

Survey of the Bible

Notes from 4-14-19 Class

The bible is easily the single most influential written document in the history of western civilization, and arguably in the world. Since it was written, it has affected art, literature and culture for billions of people, and continues to influence both Christians and non-Christians alike.

Before we can really get into the nitty gritty of the bible, there are quite a lot of caveats or fundamental issues we need to discuss. There will be several weeks of these issues, but the beginning of the fundamental issues is as follows:

1. Be aware of the genre
 - a. Just as you would not pick up a marvel comic and think you were reading a newspaper, you can not pick up the bible and imagine that you are reading a factual account written by God. The bible is loaded with an unbelievable number of genre's and each one must be kept in mind while reviewing that text.
 - b. If you think of the genre's of literature we are exposed to today (literature here meaning anything written), we have: texts, emails, newspapers, novels, comic books, history books, letters, recipes, newspapers, street signs, etc. The list could go on a very long time. The same is true of the bible. There are Mythologies, Law, History, Wisdom, Poetry, Gospel, Epistles, Prophecy, Letters, Apocalyptic Literature, etc. The list is quite long, and there are variations of each sort within each of those categories.
2. Be aware of the historical context
 - a. The things that happened in the bible started happening over 4000 years ago. The Old Testament itself was written over 1500 years before the Jewish people finally decided it was finished. It reflects a huge amount of culture and cultural changes, over many, many generations of people. Just as we cannot read a historical document from 1719 and apply all the same values or understandings to 2019, we cannot apply our current cultural understanding to the events or histories in the bible.
3. Be aware that the Bible is a human written document
 - a. Although much of the bible, especially the writings of the prophets, was inspired by God, it was still written by human beings.

Though the entire theme of the bible today (per the evangelist Paul) is that 'in Christ, God was reconciling himself to humanity', there are three central themes of the Old Testament:

1. Monotheism: There was nothing but polytheism until 2000 BCE in the ancient near east or anywhere in the entire world. Everywhere, worldwide, there was only polytheism (the worship of many gods) and generally speaking these were nature gods. Monotheism was the exclusive property of the people of Israel, and it emerged very spontaneously. There is no other record of monotheism before 2000 BCE. From 2000 BCE until about 540 BCE Israel's understanding of monotheism underwent development doctrinally.
 - a. As you can imagine it took a while to shake out all the vestiges of polytheism. So around 540 BCE the people of Israel finally get monotheism right.
 - b. In addition to monotheism, the people of the OT generally thought God was transcendent. Above and beyond time space and history. Existing independently. They desacralized nature at this point. They also thought God was immanent, close to them, involved with them. It is a contradiction that must be maintained. It's a paradox. They believed that god was a personal moral being, able to suffer with his creation, loving redemptive, faithful, just, sometimes angry, jealous, etc., but also above and outside history, time, space, etc. The bible is loaded with

contradictions that must be maintained, such as the idea that God is both three separate beings and only one being. Both are true.

- c. The Bible also does not tolerate pluralism, which is the accepting of other people's truths as potentially true. The bible insists that its truth is the only truth. Our current world view that we need to be tolerant of all religions or thoughts is not okay with the bible.
2. Election – This is an important covenant to be discussed next time.
3. The future thrust of the New Testament – We will also discuss this in more detail next time. English can't really bring out very well this idea, because ancient Hebrew doesn't translate into English very well. For example, the words in the beginning in genesis, "In the beginning..." could just as easily be translated as: "At the time of the first...", or "Toward the prime...", or "Towards the best of something..."

Next time we will review briefly and then pick up here at *Election*.