Dec 11, 2005

How to Interpret the Bible, part 3

B. SOME "BIG PICTURE" questions to help you interpret the Bible

REVIEW: POINTS 1-4:

1. BIG PICTURE #1: the Bible is a historical document.

a. Therefore, –> always ask, "What did the author want the original readers to understand by this statement?"

2. BIG PICTURE #2: The original authors wanted the original readers to *respond* in some way

(just as we want readers to respond in some way to things we write)

a. Therefore –> always ask: "What application did the original author want the readers to make to their lives?"

3. BIG PICTURE #3: The whole Bible is about God!

a. Therefore –> always ask, "What does this text tell us about God?"

4. BIG PICTURE #4: The center of the whole Bible is Jesus Christ. The entire Old Testament leads up to him and points to him, and the entire New Testament flows from him.

a. Therefore –> always ask: what does this text tell us about the greatness of Christ? (Luke 24:27)

(actually, this step should usually come before the application in step 3, to show that true application to our lives comes through Christ)

5. BIG PICTURE #5: Salvation history: All history can be divided into several major "ages" or "epochs" in salvation history

(not military history or art history or economic history or history of science, but salvation history: how was God relating to mankind at various periods in history?)

a. Therefore –>read every passage of the Bible with a salvation-history time line in your mind, and remember where each passage fits on the time line. (And grow in understanding of what God was doing in each period, how he related to his people at each time.)

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                                OT                    NT   †                          1000 yrs.
|--------|-------|-------|---------|--------|----------||----------|------------------------|---------------|----------->
Creation Fall   Abr    Moses David Exile      Christ   church age          Millennium  FJ/ NHNE
            BC 2000  1440   1000   586        AD   30        2005           ??
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b. Examples:

Lev. 11:7 not eating pigs
Lev 2:1-2 grain offering
Gen. 15:6 Abraham believed God
Gen 9:6 "whoever sheds man's blood..."
Matt 10:5-6 go nowhere among the Gentiles
Matt 23:23 tithe mint and dill and cumin
Matt. 5:43-45 love neighbor
Ps 139:21-24 hate God's enemies
Josh 6:20-21 Jericho completely destroyed
Gen 1:28 fill and subdue the earth; have dominion over it
Eph 4:1-3 walk in a manner worthy of your calling
Eph 4:25-28 speak the truth; don't steal

c. –> We are at the *same point in salvation history* as the people in the early church. Therefore there are more differences between the way the Bible applied the church in Corinth or Thessalonica or Ephesus and the Jewish people during Jesus' ministry a few years earlier (Matt

10:5-6; Matt 23:23) than there are between us in 2005 and those first-century churches. We are at the same point in salvation history as all Christians have been from Pentecost (Acts 2) until today, and will be until Christ returns.

d. In doing topical studies in the Bible, it is always good to ask what the Bible can tell us about a topic before the Fall (that is, Genesis 1-2) and in the New Heavens and New Earth (after Final Judgment; especially in parts of Revelation, but also some prophetic literature). This helps us filter out the effects of sin and also helps us understand the effects of sin in this present age.

Examples:
- subduing the earth
- technological development
- wealth and poverty
- equality of possessions?

6. BIG PICTURE #6: Themes: Because the Bible is a unity (one divine author though many human authors), there are many themes that develop and grow from Genesis to Revelation.

–> Therefore, for each significant element in any text, it is helpful to ask: (a) Where did this theme start in the Bible? (b) How did it develop? (c) Where is it going to end in the Bible?

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Theme: ******************************************************************************
Theme: ^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^
Theme: ~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~
Theme: ##########################################################################
                                OT                    NT    †                        1000 yrs.
    |--------|-------|-------|---------|--------|----------||----------|------------------------|---------------|----------->
 Creation Fall   Abr    Moses David Exile      Christ    church age          Millennium  FJ/ NHNE
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Examples:
Matthew 2: wise men
Matthew 8: stilling of the storm
other?

Next week: More on how the OT points to Christ

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(Connie also has electronic copies of these outlines starting in about June, 2005)