

Pastor Ray's Bible School #4

“The Big Picture of Scripture”

Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ,
*according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past,
but now revealed*
and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations
might believe and obey him—to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.
Romans 16:25-27

And the disciples came and said to Him, “Why do you speak to them in parables?”
He answered and said to them, “*Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of
heaven, but to them it has not been given.* For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have
abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.”
Matthew 13:10-12 NKJV

I. Solving the “Mystery” of God’s Word

A. Understanding Biblical Revelation

1. We think of “mystery” as a detective story to be solved.
2. The Biblical term “mysterion” (Gk.) refers to some operation or plan of God never before revealed. Unger’s Bible Dictionary calls it “previously hidden truth”.
3. God has not given us the Bible as a “mystery” to be solved, but as a *revelation* of previously hidden truth!
4. This truth is revealed (unveiled, disclosed) by God alone and is sovereignly and graciously granted to His chosen people. Not everyone has been given the understanding of God’s Word. (See Matthew 13:10-11)
5. The Apostle Paul uses the term 21 times in his writings, always in the sense of something previously hidden, a former mystery that now is revealed!

B. The Conundrum of “Hidden Revelation”

1. Martin Luther coined the phrase “hidden revelation”, a seemingly oxymoronic term meant to describe how God remains “hidden”, even in His revelations. (See Isaiah 45:15; 48:4, 6)

*To Luther, the Cross was the greatest manifestation of God’s love ever given to man; yet this *revelation* was *hidden* so that many don’t see it (though it’s right there before

them). This “hidden revelation” pertains to the scriptures as well. The Word of God is God’s *revelation* to mankind, but its meaning is *hidden* from the eyes of sinful men.

2. This wisdom is there; it is present, yet not clearly understood by all who are confronted with it. The Apostle Paul called this “hidden wisdom”.

“But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world to our glory...which none of the princes of this world knew...”
1 Corinthians 2:7-8

3. Jesus spoke many truths in parables, later revealing them to His “chosen ones”, His disciples.

II. The Prophetic View of Scripture

A. Understanding the Parts by First Understanding the Whole

1. The prophetic view, as we use it, is not about prophecy in terms of “understanding or foretelling the future”.

2. Our approach is based on the Old Testament definition of a prophet as a “seer”.

“In those days in Israel, when a man went to inquire of God, he would say, ‘Come, let us go to the seer’...for in those days he that is now called a prophet was called a seer...”
1 Samuel 9:9

3. To learn the prophetic view of scripture, we have to learn to “see” from God’s viewpoint...a higher, more encompassing view!

a. Tom Hanks, in the movie *Castaway*, stranded on a deserted island, climbs to the highest point to understand the nature of his new home.

b. When lost in the woods, we climb a tree to get our bearings.

c. Parents in the farmlands of Kansas teach the children not to wander into the cornfields where it’s easy to be lost and dangerous, because they could not see!

d. Men once thought the earth was flat. Their view wasn’t “high” enough! So we should be “Son-centered”, not “sun-centered”! Our “prophetic view” sees from God’s perspective, not man’s!

4. We will be studying the Bible from “big pictures” of scripture, understanding the whole, so we can better interpret the parts.

5. Every session of this Bible course is designed to show you how to grasp major principles and grand schemes of scripture.

6. The best illustration of our approach is the jigsaw puzzle.
 - a. If you attempt to put the puzzle together by studying each piece, you'll probably never get the "big picture".
 - b. If you study the picture on the box, you can more easily figure out where each piece fits into place.
 - c. As we learn to "see" the Bible like this, we come to understand scripture in a whole new way.
7. The more steeped in "discontinuity" one becomes, the more difficult it is to understand the Bible aright.

B. The Problem of Dispensationalism

1. Dispensational Theology, popularized in the past 150 years or so, teaches that God deals with mankind in "dispensations", that he administers His relationship to us differently in different time periods and on different bases.

"Dispensationalism is a system of biblical interpretation and of theology which divides God's working into different periods which He administers on different bases. It involves a literal interpretation of scripture, a distinction between the church and Israel, and a premillennial, pretribulational eschatology."

Bakers' Concise Dictionary of Christian Theology

2. In this system, God changes His methods and dealings with man down through history by way of seven distinct time periods, *versus* the view of Covenant Theology, in which God deals with man in one way, through "covenants", of which two are primary and transcendent.
3. This course will not debate the two systems. However, only Covenant Theology supplies the unified, consistent backdrop to understand the Bible from the prophetic point of view.

III. The Prophetic View and Covenant Theology

A. Restoring the Continuity of the Bible

1. In Covenant Theology there is one God, one method of dealing with man (via covenant), one (redeemed) people of God, one consistent purpose of God in creating man, and one Book that tells the story, consisting of Old and New Testament.
2. The purpose of God is unchanged from creation: *to rule His creation through delegated authority.*

a. Expressed in the Old Covenant as the Dominion Mandate (Genesis 1:26-28)

b. Expressed in the New Covenant as the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20)

- In the Old Testament, the commandment is “dominion” over the physical world.
 - In the New Testament, the Commission is to “make disciples” of all nations.
 - In both cases, the result would be the same: God ruling through His delegates.
 - In the Old Testament, a fallen man forever disqualified himself and his descendants from taking dominion.
 - In the New Testament, an un-fallen man forever qualified Himself and His descendants by making disciples.
 - God’s sovereign plan as to *how* He would rule through His delegates was a mystery not revealed until after the resurrection of Christ!
3. The Bible begins in a sinless state (Genesis 1 to Genesis 3), and ends in a sinless state (Revelation 21-22). This is a total of about 6 pages in the Bible! *The rest is conflict.*
- a. A Holy God creates a holy universe and man. (3 pages)
- b. Sin enters and plagues mankind and creation. (1,302 pages)
- c. A Holy God and His redeemed people restore a holy creation. (3 pages)
4. It would be fair to say that the Bible is mostly about how God redeems His fallen creatures and restores the harmony of the sinless condition through redemption and restoration in the midst of conflict.
5. The Bible is the “big picture” of how God brings about His eternal purposes for His own glory.

B. Genesis: The Seed Plot of the Bible

1. It is impossible to overestimate the importance of the first book of the Bible.
2. Genesis is from a root word meaning “beginnings” or “origin”. (From the same root word we get the English words “genes”, “genetics” and “genealogy”.)
3. Genesis is sometimes called the “seed plot” of the Bible.
4. Every major doctrine in the Bible is found in “seed form” in Genesis.

- a. God's intention for marriage (one man with one woman) and family as foundational for human society (Genesis 2:18, 21-24)
 - b. Human labor (Genesis 2:15)
 - c. The two "trees", representing the two great "choices" every man must make: eat of the tree of life, or eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil
 - d. The "serpent" as a liar (Genesis 3:4-5)
 - e. Fear and shame, the two great results of sin (Genesis 3:7)
 - f. Religion, as represented by the aprons of fig leaves, man's attempt to cover his sin (See Jesus' cursing of the fig tree in Mark 11) and in the difference between Cain's offering and Abel's offering (Genesis 4)
 - g. The Gospel (Genesis 3:15) and the 'protoevangel' (Genesis 15:6)
 - h. The "two cities" of human history, Babylon in Genesis 11, and the "city of God" in seed form in Genesis 12 (Cf. Hebrews 11:8-10)
5. The first five books of the Old Testament, Genesis-Deuteronomy, and the first five books of the New Testament, Matthew-Acts, are foundational to their respective testaments, and cannot be overestimated as to their importance.

C. Genesis and Revelation: The Beginning and the End

1. Now we can match the "Alpha" and "Omega" books of scripture in such a way as to establish biblical continuity. *If you know how it begins and how it ends, you can interpret the journey!*
2. Genesis, the "book of beginnings", is often called the "seed plot of the Bible", because every major Bible doctrine can be found here in "seed form".
 - a. What we see at the "end", is what we saw at the "beginning", but now "full grown", completed or fulfilled.
 - b. It's ultimate (telic) purpose is now realized.
3. This is why two books, authored by men who lived almost 3000 years apart, (Moses and the Apostle John), contain amazing similarities, both books featuring:
 - a. The tree of life (Gen. 2:9; 3:22 and Rev. 2:7:22:2, 14)
 - b. A river (Gen. 2:10 and Rev.22:102)

- c. A wedding and a bride (Gen. 2:22-23 and Rev. 21:2, 9)
 - d. God walking with man (Gen. 3:8 and Rev. 3:4; 21:23-24)
 - e. God's plan, ruling through His delegates, unchanged (Gen. 1:26-28 and Rev. 20:4-6; 21:7)
 - f. Paradise closed becomes paradise opened (Gen. 3:22-4 and Rev. 2:7)
 - g. Dispossession through sin, becomes repossession through grace
 - h. The curse is turned into a blessing
 - i. Access to the tree of life, denied in Genesis, is restored in Revelation
 - j. The beginning of sorrow and death yields to a condition of no more sin and death
 - k. Man's dominion in Adam, broken in Genesis, is restored in Christ
 - l. The triumph of the Serpent becomes the triumph of the Lamb
4. Revelation brings us the completion or fulfillment of the "seeds" of Genesis
- a. One man becomes a great race.
 - b. The garden (in which man dwells) becomes the city (in which God dwells).
 - c. The serpent's sentence, *pronounced* in Genesis 3, is *executed* in Revelation 20.
 - d. The promised victory of the "seed of the woman" (Christ) over the "seed of the serpent" (fallen man) is finally fully revealed in the Apocalypse.
 - e. Genesis, the foundation of the Bible becomes Revelation, the capstone of what God has been building.
5. The entire Bible might be titled "The War between the Seeds", since the "proto-evangel" of Genesis 3:15 accurately describes the conflict of Genesis 3 through Revelation 20.

- a. The “seed” of the serpent, his word, corrupts the “seed” of man, (Adam), when he accepts that word over and above the authority of God’s Word.
- b. The revelation of this to Adam, the loss of the “glory” and sense of “nakedness”, causes him to fashion “aprons” to “cover” his sinfulness. (The aprons symbolize covering for the loss of Adam’s ability to reproduce a godly “seed”).
- c. God covers Adam and Eve with skins of animals He has slain, symbolizing the need for blood atonement, the death of an innocent for sin, and the inability of “fig leaves” (man-made religion) to atone for iniquity.
- d. The “seed of the woman”, Christ in His virgin birth, will “crush” the serpent, as the war between the seeds becomes the story of the Bible!

III. A Brief Study on the Importance of Numbers in Scripture

A. Scholarly Studies

1. Down through the centuries, great Bible scholars have studied the importance of numbers in scripture.
2. Though there are many works on this subject, we recommend the classic book, *Number in Scripture* by E.W. Bullinger.(Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, MI)
3. Certain numbers are used so many times in the Bible that patterns emerge; these patterns convey principles that give us a broader understanding of the text. As with typology, hermeneutical guidelines should be observed to prevent fanciful interpretation. Nevertheless, the study of the use of number in scripture will be helpful to you.

B. Numbers and Their Meaning: For You to Study on Your Own

1. One-Unity; denotes primacy (“Seek ye first the kingdom...” and the first commandment); that which is indivisible, therefore, often used for Deity (see Deuteronomy 6:4-5); marks the beginning; independence
2. Two- in a “positive” context, the number of witness; denotes another; in a “negative” context, the number of division or opposition
3. Three-God; identified with the nature of the triune God; His three primary attributes (omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence); triune man as spirit, soul and body; all of time measured as past, present, and future; all colors come from

only three primary colors; three primary kingdoms (animal, vegetable, mineral)
[We will study this number at length in another session.]

4. Four- the World; as 3 + 1, speaks of God's creation; four regions of the earth;
four seasons of the year; four gospels

5. Five- Grace

6. Six-Man

7. Seven-Spiritual Perfection

8. Eight-New Beginnings

9. Nine-Finality (or Judgment)

10. Ten-Ordinal Perfection or Testing

11. Eleven-Falling Short of Divine Government

12. Twelve-Divine Government or Headship

(Other numbers of significance: 30, 40, 50, 70, 100, 300, 666, 1000, 10,000)

IV. Conclusion: The Bible as Covenant History

A. Once we grasp the prophetic view of scripture, we see one continuous covenant history of relationship between God and His people.

B. Because God is a God of principle, and because He does not change, patterns Emerge that give us keys for living abundant lives.

C. Like a giant jigsaw puzzle, gazing at the picture on the box helps us interpret where the little pieces go...and encourages us that there IS a final destination where everything is as the Creator desired it to be!