

Unit 5 Assignment

Exploring the Bible



Rob Newton
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Part a, Outline of personal understanding of the nature of Scripture and Biblical authority.



The Bible, as a collection of books, has been written, altered, translated, collated, copied, studied, paraphrased and analysed over the thousands of years of its existence. One thing that cannot be said of the Bible is that it is untouched by human hands.

The question here is how much of the Bible is touched by God's hand?

Different writings

Within the Bible books are many methods of conveying the nature of God. The range of style and writing techniques is phenomenal and many different authors hail from not only different countries and therefore using different languages but from different times and completely different cultures. Yet together, as one book, the Bible has a beginning, a middle and an end. There is a continuity which spans time and place and all language and all methods of retelling the story of the relationship between God and His people.

The history of the people of Israel from inception through near destruction, through exile and slavery, through salvation and expansion is recalled like an epic movie screen play. Often thought too unrealistic to be the complete truth yet archaeologists are still revealing long hidden evidence that points to the facts of some of those events. The social history of the people is written in the old testament as lists of rules and instructions and the genealogy is tabled alongside the story to impress upon the reader the importance of those families and characters within them.

There is a multitude of poetic writing in the Bible. This demonstrates the artistry of periods of history when spiritual life was foremost and human life was more dispensable than today. In a time when everyone was skilled in the art of killing his fellow man some were also skilled at producing great works of song and poetry. Though this work was not just for pleasure but teaching and instruction, for preaching and for worship. Each song and each piece of poetry extols the wonder of God and expounds His character.

The prophets of our God fill many a page with elaborate and decorative writings of visions and dreams. Many foretelling the future history yet to be unfolded in language of images and pictures cryptically described in the text. Once unravelled they have been revealed as true revelations of what has come to be rather than the ranting of eccentric weirdoes.

From four different angles the gospels tell the same story of how one man transforms the world forever. Each different because the author was different and the potential audience was

different. Some were witnesses to events, some heard it from others and some researched the story thoroughly. Each gospel has some different start points, incidents, parables, sayings and details and still each tells the whole story, each in a way appropriate for its audience.

Letters sent to individuals, faith communities and young churches set out to explain and teach the nature of Christ and our life as His disciples. Though they are addressed specifically their content has spanned the vastness of time and has crossed the diversity of cultures to speak to all Christians even to today.

The Bible ends with the fantastical imagery of the apocalyptic book of Revelation. The visual language used creates an image far better than even Disney could create in animation. It tells the final chapter of the story of our God and His people.

Same story

An investigator arrives at a crash scene with no idea what happened. The road layout, the light, the weather, the vehicles are all as they appear. There may be paramedics, casualties, witnesses and police all with a story to tell from different angles. The location will have a history as will all the people involved, something will have led all the elements to be in that one place at that one time. There will be cause and effect that created the collision. Something happened that made something else occur which forced other things to interact with something else before and after the main event. Everything intertwines with everything else to make the whole. From the smallest speck of forensic evidence to the miles of open tarmac stretching into the distance, everything has a part to play.

We can view a small, individual item and be intrigued by its story. We can come away with great knowledge of that item and its existence and we can all benefit from that knowledge. Or we can view the whole, step back and see the bigger picture, the fuller story, and gain a great understanding of what happened, how and why.

The Bible can also be viewed in this way; a collection of diverse evidence, information and knowledge but all leading us to God. Each element can stand alone and become an integral part of the much larger entity.

A lamp to my feet and a light to my path

The Methodist conference instructed the faith and order committee to produce a document outlining the nature of authority and the place of the Bible within the Methodist church. The booklet 'A lamp to my feet and a light to my path' is that document. Within the report are seven different models and perceptions of the authority of the Bible held by members of the Methodist church. They range greatly in their stance and represent general views rather than being precise definitions.

To locate a personal position on this generalised scale from one to seven an exercise was undertaken to highlight the sentences and/or phrases that could be readily agreed with in all of the views. The view with the most highlighter thereby becomes the one closest to my personal view. There is not one view that is agreed with in its entirety though the sentiment within the first view encapsulates my overall general opinion.

I shall summarise my opinions within the views in reverse order;
(please refer to 'A lamp to my feet and a light to my path' chapter 7 part 9)

- 7.9.7 "The Bible comprises a diverse collection of documents which represent the experiences of various people in various times and places. The Christian's task is to follow the example of Christ".
The remainder of this view represents a 20th century modernist view based on a faith from the mind and on plausible evidence supporting spirituality. Faith should be based, however, on a belief in something unproven and supernatural.
- 7.9.6 "The Bible witnesses to God's revelation of himself through history and supremely through Jesus Christ"
The view goes on to intimate a 'take your pick' attitude where readers can discern the truth from various areas within the Bible. This view purports the Bible to contain the witness of God but not be the witness itself.
- 7.9.5 "The Bible is one of the main ways in which God speaks to the believer"
The movement of the Spirit should not be restricted by messages in the Bible. More over the Bible can be used to confirm the messages of today from the Spirit. The two should never conflict but always concur the underlying truths of God.
- 7.9.4 This view holds no credence in my opinion. Although it maybe the 'task' of preachers to bring the understanding of the Bible's teaching to the people they should not be seen to have more authority to interpret the will of God than the Bible. A preacher should not conflict with Biblical teaching only on points of detail relevant only in distant cultures. The issue of women's role in society for an example.
- 7.9.3 "The Bible is the essential foundation on which Christian faith and life are built"
This view goes on to stress the importance of cultural context in the teachings of the Bible. Much importance is put on the differences of cultures between Bible times and now, however, most teachings are still exactly as relevant today as then. The Bible has never given the wrong message due to cultural context and most teachings are about our relationship with God and with each other which is essentially the same now as it has ever been.
- 7.9.2 "The Bible's teaching about God, salvation and Christian living is entirely trustworthy." "it provides the supreme rule for faith"
It is difficult to see how certain parts of the Bible could be extracted and upheld as essentially authoritative and other aspects be ignored as irrelevant or scientifically or historically in error. Many instances of historical inaccuracy have been proven to be archaeological errors rather than Biblical ones. Our responsibilities to God, each other, and our planet remain constant even with the use of increased scientific knowledge. Just because there is no specific mention of something doesn't mean the teaching behind it's use does not apply.
- 7.9.1 "The Bible is the word of God and is entirely trustworthy and has complete authority in all matters of theology and behaviour. It is God breathed. The Christian's task is to discern accurately what the Bible teaches and then to believe and obey it. Reason, experience and tradition should be judged in the light of the Bible, not the other way round"
The inspiration of God put into human hands must mean the potential for error exists. Even this human frailty can be put to work for God. An error found is a Bible studied and a Bible studied is someone brought nearer to God.

Authority

The Bible is the bench mark by which all is measured.

Between the pages of the Bible there are contradictions, errors and confusions. But that doesn't mean they have no purpose or place there. We often find God through questioning, through a search for answers, God is there in those contradictions just as He is there in the poetry and epic stories. He is there in the errors that make us think as well as the grandeur that fills us with awe.

This is a book of books with the supernatural life changing power of the living God between it's pages.



Part b, A Hymn to precede a reading from scripture and explanation of the reasons for the choice.

Scripture: John 17:11-12

¹¹I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name--the name you gave me--so that they may be one as we are one. ¹²While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled.

Hymn Choice

Your name is Holy

You are the sovereign 'I am' Your name is Holy
 You are the pure, spotless lamb Your name is Holy
 You are the Almighty one Your name is Holy
 You are the Christ, God's own son Your name is Holy

In Your name, there is mercy for sin
 There is safety within, in Your name is Holy
 In Your name, there is strength to remain
 To stand in spite of pain, Your name is Holy

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Reason for choice

This hymn puts across the underlying message of the scripture as demonstrated in the commentary in a way that allows it to be remembered and kept in context.

It is a fairly simplistic song with two separate parts. The first section creates a list of some attributes of God all concluding with the same phrase, 'Your name is Holy'. There is enough instrumental music between lines two and three for people to read and take in the next two.

In the second part the words get more space in the music to be heard and understood but again the repeated phrase and the point to put across is that our God is a Holy God, righteous and pure, sacred and divine. The name of God is for the forgiveness of sins, for strength and courage in the face of adversity and for protection against evil.

Commentary

Jesus was praying to the Father for his disciples. He realised that during His ministry on earth he had protected them and that after he was taken to be with the Father this would no longer be the case. Jesus' prayer on behalf of the disciples is specific; "protect them by the power of Your name". It is accepted that in Biblical times names had far greater significance than they do now and that the name itself had power. There were rules and taboos about names that were allowed to be spoken or written down and those that could not. Many times throughout the old and the new testaments great miracles were performed preceded by the

words “In the name of God”. It is by the power of the name of God that Jesus asks for their protection.

Jesus then interjects with the phrase “**the name you gave me**” signifying that same power attributable to God is also attributable to Jesus. This power, and with it the authority to use that power, was seen used for the healing of the sick and the forgiveness of sins as well as protection from evil. Jesus was praying for that name and that power to be bestowed upon the disciples also to continue His ministry.

In the same way that there is a joined relationship between God and Jesus, the prayer asks that the disciples have that relationship between themselves also; “**so that they may be one as we are one.**” Joined together by invisible bonds of brotherhood and love. So that, whatever should befall the disciples after Jesus has left them, they can continue to love and support each other by the power of the name of our Holy God.

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