

## How to Interpret the Bible, part 2

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

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 BIG PICTURE #1: the Bible is a historical document.

- Therefore, → always ask, "What did the author want the original readers to understand by this statement?"
- Although the Bible does speak to us today, because it is a historical document you should first think about what any text was doing in its original setting
- This will help you avoid short-circuiting the application process and wrongly applying texts that don't apply to you (Matt 27:5; Luke 10:37)
- This will help you to avoid fanciful allegories

Example: David trying on Saul's armor before he goes to fight Goliath: 1 Samuel 17:38-40

Fanciful allegories:

Saul's sword, armor, 5 smooth stones

Correct understanding (what would author have wanted readers to think about?):

Saul's sword =                      Saul's armor =

Five smooth stones =

But there is more in the text of course:

David trusted in the Lord to protect him and to work through the weapons and abilities that God had given him, and God gave him victory.

**1 Samuel 17:37** And David said, "The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." And Saul said to David, "Go, and the LORD be with you!"

→ there will be application to us today (see below)

- Yet part of the historical context is that the Bible is a divine & human book, and sometimes the divine author can intend more than the human author understands (John 11:49; 1 Pet. 1:10-12; Isa. 7:14; Isa. 9:6; Isa. 53, etc.)
- I don't think that God's intended meaning is ever less than or in contradiction to the human author's intended meaning, but point (e) above shows that it can sometimes be more than the human author intended

And note one interesting case (Gen 27:27) where the text shows that God overrides the meaning intended by a human speaker (not a human author of Scripture):

#### 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)

- Therefore → always ask: "What application did the original author want the readers to make to their lives?"
- Example:

David trusted in the Lord to protect him and to work through the weapons and abilities that God had given him, and God gave him victory. (1 Sam 17:37)

→ The *original readers* of 1 Samuel should likewise trust in the Lord to protect them, work through the weapons, abilities God had given them, and give them victory

→ In a similar way, *we too* should trust in the Lord to protect us and work through the tools and abilities God has given us, and give us victory in the tasks he calls us to

– but there are some differences in NT tasks, "weapons": (2 Cor 10:3-4)

- Example: John 11:43-47 → why did John mention that some Jews did not believe? (what application did he want original readers to make to their lives?)

d. Example: Matt 23:25-28

Is this a correct application? → Pharisees = religious leaders of that day

Therefore these woes apply to pastors and Sunday School teachers today (??)

→ these religious leaders \_\_\_\_\_

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

- Therefore → always ask, "What does this text tell us about God?"

- b. Example: David and Goliath  
 not just: David had courage, therefore we should have courage (= human-centered moralism)  
 rather: David trusted in God, and God gave him courage and gave him victory over Goliath  
 It's right there in the text: 1 Sam 16:13; 17:26, 37, 45, 49-51
- c. What is the meaning of this text? There is much.
- (1) God has chosen "a man after his own heart" (1 Sam. 13:14) to be King of Israel (David is going to replace Saul as king).
  - (2) God anointed and protected and empowered David to defeat the most powerful enemy of God's people (Goliath)
  - (3) No earthly power could stand against the Lord (note 1 Sam 17:4-7: Goliath's size and armor). He protected and saved his people.
  - (4) David was zealous to defend God's honor. He trusted in God to the point of putting his own life on the line, and God rewarded David's faithfulness and obedience – obedience even unto death.
  - (5) After the battle, God gave great honor to his anointed king and brought the people of God into a time of great harmony, peace, and blessing under the leadership of King David. (see Jas 1:12)

**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?  
 (actually, this step should usually come before the application in step 3, to show that true application to our lives comes through Christ)
- b. **Luke 24:27** And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.
- c. Example: what does the story of David and Goliath tell us about the Messiah to come? Is there any way in which God was preparing his people for the Messiah by teaching them what the Messiah would be like through the lives of various historical figures?
- d. This text tells us much about things yet to come:
- (1) God is going to choose someone yet greater than David, someone who is truly "a man after his own heart" (1 Sam. 13:14) to be King of Israel forever: (see also John 12:13)
  - (2) God is going to anoint and protect and empower a coming Messiah who will defeat the most powerful enemy of God's people (Satan) (Matt 12:28-29; Gen 3:15 w/ Rom 16.20)
  - (3) No earthly power will be able to stand against the coming Messiah. He will come in the strength and power of the Lord and will defeat all his enemies and reign as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.
  - (4) There is a Messiah coming who will, like David, be zealous to defend God's honor. He will trust in God even to the point of putting his own life on the line. After he is obedient unto death, God will highly exalt him. (Phil 2:8-11)
  - (5) After the coming Messiah defeats all his enemies, God will empower him to bring his people into a time of great harmony, peace, and blessing under the leadership of their eternal King (Rev 11:15-17)
- e. Though Jesus in his first coming fulfilled many of these things, he will bring a yet greater fulfillment at his second coming

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