

Pastor Ray's Bible School #2

“An Overview of the Bible”

I. The Bible: One Book, Two Parts

A. Importance of the Old Testament

1. The Bible is one book in two parts.
2. We can only understand the Bible as one whole book.
 - a. There is no discontinuity between the Old and New Testaments.
 - b. The New Testament does not replace the Old Testament.
 - c. There is no inconsistency between the Old and New Testaments.
3. The Bible teaches that God deals with men on the basis of covenant, not “dispensations”.

B. Scope of the Bible

1. The Bible begins in the beginning of time and ends after time is no more; so the Bible moves us from “eternity past” to “eternity future”*.

*To be accurate, “eternity” is not a long time; it’s *no time at all*. The terms “eternity past” and “eternity future” describe the “bookends” of earthly, human history.

2. Except for a few verses at the beginning and end of the Bible, scripture deals with time and space, with human history.
 - a. The first two chapters of the Bible depict conditions before the entrance of sin; the last two chapters of the Bible depict conditions after sin has been dealt with through the full manifestation of Christ’s victory on the cross.
 - b. The rest of the Bible is about the conflict between God and Satan, the “seed of the serpent” and the “seed of the woman” (Christ), between good and evil, light and darkness.
 - c. This is the epic struggle into which all men are born.

3. The Bible is “history”, or better, “His Story”.
 - a. The Bible tells us how it all began; the Bible tells us how it all will end.
 - b. The Bible tells us where we came from and where we are going.
 - c. The Bible tells us why we are here, and why there is so much suffering and evil in the world.
 - d. The Bible tells us *Who* is in charge of all things and assures us that there is a *purpose* for all things that come to pass.
4. No other book in the history of the world has assumed to speak with such authority and scope!

II. Comparing the Old and New Testaments

A. Two Central Figures

1. The central figure in the Old Testament is the first man, Adam; the central figure in the New Testament is the second man, the last Adam, Jesus of Nazareth. (See 1 Corinthians 15:44-47)
2. The first man breaks his covenant with God through disobedience and brings the curse of spiritual death on all his descendants; the second man keeps His covenant with God through obedience and brings upon all His descendants the blessing of eternal life.
 - a. “Death” in the Bible does not mean a cessation of existence; it speaks of separation from God.
 - b. Therefore spiritual “life” in the Bible means eternal existence in the presence of God.
3. The Old Testament centers around the first man, a “living soul”; the New Testament centers around the second man, a “life-giving spirit”.
4. The Old Testament emphasizes the external, the physical and the natural; the New Testament emphasizes the internal condition, the spiritual and the supernatural.
5. These two testaments confirm and supplement one another, God’s two “witnesses”, mutually verifying and corroborating with one another.

B. The Old Testament (See your Bible's Table of Contents)

1. The 39 books that comprise the Old Testament break down into three very distinct parts.
 - a. Seventeen *historical* books (Genesis-Esther)
 - b. Five *poetical* books (Job-Song of Solomon)
 - c. Seventeen *prophetic* books (Isaiah-Malachi)
2. The New Testament consists of three sections.
 - a. Five historical books (Matthew-Acts)
 - b. Eighteen church epistles (nine Gentile church epistles, Romans-II Thessalonians; nine Hebrew church epistles, Hebrews-Revelation)
 - c. Four pastoral epistles (I & II Timothy, Titus, Philemon)
3. The symmetry of Old and New Testament structure is undeniable.

III. The Scarlet Thread of Redemption

A. The Old Testament

1. History is chronological; the books of the Bible are not.
2. One of the best ways to understand the Bible is by following the great characters of scripture, the redeemed of all the ages who make up the “scarlet thread of redemption” that runs from Genesis to Revelation.
 - a. Genesis: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob; ends with the death of Joseph
 - b. Exodus-Deuteronomy: 400 years after the death of Joseph, begins with the story of Moses; Deuteronomy ends with the death of Moses.
 - c. Joshua: Joshua, Moses’ protégée, is the central character of this book, which ends with his death.
 - d. Judges and Ruth: With the death of Joshua, and prior to the establishment of the kingdom in 1 Samuel, we see the stories of 13 different rulers or “judges” of Israel. The more notable figures include Gideon, Barak, Deborah, Samson, and Japheth; Ruth is a marvelous little book describing events that took place during the times of the judges.

e. 1 & 2 Samuel: Three primary figures, Samuel, Saul, and one of the greatest heroes of scripture, David. These books describe the chapter of Israel's history where they change from being a theocracy to a kingdom. The only nation in the history of the world that ever was theocratic in government (one system of Law for civil and religious policy) was Israel prior to 1 Samuel 1.

f. 1 & 2 Kings & 1 & 2 Chronicles: Solomon's heirs split the kingdom of Israel into two parts, Judah and Israel. The balance of Kings and Chronicles describes the various kings of the two nations, mostly evil, and the backslidden condition of the nation. (Famous and infamous kings of this period include the good - Hezekiah, Jehosaphat, Josiah, and the evil - Rehoboam, Manasseh, Ahab, etc.)

g. The prophets minister during the reigns of the various kings, so the prophetic books are not sequential or chronological. (The prophets include Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Jonah and Malachi)

3. The later prophets report God's judgment on Israel by expelling them from the land and taking them captive to Babylon. The Old Testament ends with the return of a remnant of the exiles to await the birth of the Messiah, some 400 years after the close of the Old Testament canon.

4. The Old Testament has the following major "time-line":

- Adam is created. (Genesis 1)
- Adam falls in sin. (Genesis 3)
- Noah saves a remnant from the flood. (Genesis 6)
- God judges Babylon. (Genesis 11)
- God calls Abraham, the prototype of all believers. (Genesis 12)
- Abraham's descendants, Isaac and Jacob, serve the Lord and grow into a tribe of nomadic herdsman. (Genesis 13-36)
- Jacob's son, Joseph, saves his people from famine, bringing them into Egypt to care for them. (Genesis 30, 37-50)
- After Joseph's death, the descendants of Abraham are enslaved, and over the next 400 years, grow into a multitude. (Exodus 1ff)
- Moses is born (Exodus 1), and called as a deliverer. (Exodus 3)
- The nation is delivered from Egyptian bondage and taken on a 40-year trek through the wilderness. (Exodus 4-Deuteronomy)
- Moses dies (end of Deuteronomy), and the nation finally enters the land under the ministry of Joshua.
- Joshua dies, and leadership passes through the hands of a number of "judges", men (and one woman) who became temporary deliverers of Israel.
- The last judge, Samuel, anoints the first king of Israel, Saul. (1 Samuel)

- Saul's disobedience causes God to remove him and give the throne to a worthy successor, David.
 - David's son Solomon takes the throne, but proves to be less than his father.
 - After Solomon's death, his son's foolish leadership causes the nation to be divided, with a number of kings, mostly unworthy, ruling over Judah and Israel. (1 Kings-2 Chronicles)
5. Israel is judged by God for its idolatry and rebellion, and sent into exile in Babylon and Persia.
 6. After an extended period of judgment, God begins to restore some of the exiles to Israel under the ministries of Ezra and Nehemiah.
 7. The Old Testament ends with a remnant of Israel being restored to the land. Then follows four centuries of what Bible scholars call "the silent years".

B. The New Testament

1. After 400 years of silence, during which there was no word from God or "open vision" comes the voice of *the last of the Old Testament prophets*, John the Baptist!
 - a. John fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah, that the coming of the Promised One, the Messiah, would be preceded by a "voice, crying in the wilderness...to prepare the way of the Lord".
 - b. The message of John was simple: "Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand!"
2. The first four books of the New Testament, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, all describe the ministry of the Promised One, the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth!
 - a. Why four Gospels? Because the prophecy of the Messiah predicted four "faces" or dimensions of ministry!

Also out of the midst thereof came the likeness of four living creatures.
 And this was their appearance; *they had the likeness of a man*.
 As for the likeness of their faces, they four had the face of a *man*,
 and the face of a *lion*, on the right side;
 and they four had the face of an *ox* on the left side;
 they four also had the face of an *eagle*.
 Ezekiel 1: 5, 10 KJV

And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal:
 and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne,
 were four beasts full of eyes before and behind.
 And the first beast was like a *lion*, and the second beast like an *ox*,

and the third beast had a face as a man,
and the fourth beast was like *a flying eagle*.
Revelation 4: 6-7 KJV

b. These prophecies, one from the Old Testament and one from the New Testament, given centuries apart, have four identical characteristics; many Bible scholars have noticed how the four “faces” reflect the four different emphases of the nature of Christ expressed in the four Gospels!

- Matthew: Christ with the face of a lion - Matthew, a Levitical Jew, focused on the Messiah as the “Lion of the tribe of Judah”. He mentions the kingdom of God constantly in his Gospel, focuses on the Messiah’s nature as “King”, and primarily addresses Jews.
- Mark: Christ as the ox, the most valuable serving animal known to Israel - Mark’s Gospel focuses on Christ coming to serve mankind, a message addressed to the Romans, who valued domination.
- Luke: Christ as a man, with Luke employing the term “Son of man” over and over again. This Gospel stresses the humanity of Christ, a rebuke to the Gnostic influence of Greek philosophy.
- John: Christ as the eagle, which lives in the highest elevations, and flies the highest of all God’s creatures. John’s Gospel emphasizes the deity of Christ, and is primarily addressed to the Church.

c. It is fascinating to see how Ezekiel and John, who received visions hundreds of years apart, describe the creatures living closest to the throne of God as having these four dominant characteristics, features that would be prominently displayed in Jesus of Nazareth- the lion, the ox, the man and the eagle, representing strength, service, intelligence and spirituality, all expressed at the highest levels!

3. In the Gospels, the “scarlet thread of redemption” presents Christ and:

- a. The “three”-Peter James and John
- b. The “twelve”-Peter, James, John and 9 more
- c. The “70”-His delegated ministry representatives

4. In Acts, on the Day of Pentecost, the number is extended to 3,000. Acts describes the early church and what happened immediately after the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. Acts primarily focuses on the ministries of two men:

- a. Simon Peter sent to preach to the Jews (first 8 chapters)
- b. Paul, formerly Saul of Tarsus, sent to the Gentiles (final 20 chapters)

5. The rest of the New Testament, after Acts, consists of 22 “epistles”, or letters- nine to Gentile churches, nine to Jewish churches, and four pastoral epistles, written to individuals Paul had set into the ministry.
6. So we see the scarlet thread of redemption, which began with the faith of Abel in Genesis 4, ending in Revelation, with an innumerable multitude of the redeemed praising God forever and ever!!! This is the “Big Picture of Scripture”!