

Bible Sunday sermon

Today is Bible Sunday. So first question: what is the bible?

The Bible is a collection of religious texts or scriptures sacred in Christianity, Judaism, Samaritanism, and many other religions. The Bible is an anthology – a compilation of texts of a variety of forms – originally written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Koine Greek. Wikipedia

Some people say that the Bible is a collection of myths and fairy tale, outdated and of no modern relevance. I am not one of them.

Fundamentally, directly, and indirectly the Bible is a book of prophecy. Beginning at the beginning in Genesis and ending with the book of Revelation it tells the stories of God's ineffable plan for the redemption and salvation of the souls of humankind – then, now and in the future. Some things are in plain sight, some are obscure, some await revelation at the appropriate time.

Proverbs 25.2

It is the glory of God to conceal things,
but the glory of kings is to search things out.

Those who say it is outdated and needs modern interpretation miss the point of the work of God's holy scripture to disturb and challenge us:

Hebrews 4.12

Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

As witness to its living nature, those that gather to study the Word in the power of the Holy Spirit inevitably come up with new revelation for here and now.

The bible comprises the Old and New Testaments or Covenants or Promises. God's promises to his people; firstly the chosen people, the Israelites in the Old Testament; secondly the universal message of salvation for believers in Christ Jesus in the New Testament.

We say the Old Testament is alien and strange, it is full of sex, violence and infidelity to God, but this is not so different to the world that believers navigate today. If we put ourselves in the shoes of the Israelite, and delve into the language, this bears amazing fruit, it does not detract but enriches and enlightens our understanding of the New Testament.

Jesus reads the Old Testament as prophecy.

Jesus unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

18 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,

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19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'

Jesus quotes from Isaiah 61.1 a book written hundreds of years before Jesus' birth. He quotes it again to John the Baptist's disciples.

John the Baptist, who endorsed Jesus as Messiah at the River Jordan is now uneasy, why? Jesus is healing Gentiles.

Luke 7.18-23

18b So John summoned two of his disciples 19and sent them to the Lord to ask, 'Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?' 20When the men had come to him, they said, 'John the Baptist has sent us to you to ask, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?"'

21Jesus had just then cured many people of diseases, plagues, and evil spirits, and had given sight to many who were blind. 22And he answered them, 'Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them. 23And blessed is anyone who takes no offence at me.' It is John himself that Jesus is asking not to be offended, to open his mind and understand.

Prophecy points to salvation. Much of Old Testament prophecy points to Messiah. Look at this message hidden in plain sight in a list of Hebrew names.

From Luke 3. 36b-38 here is a section of the genealogy of Messiah – his family tree. Shem son of Noah, son of Lamech, son of Methuselah, son of Enoch, son of Jared, son of Mahalaleel, son of Cainan, son of Enos, son of Seth, son of Adam, son of God.¹

Let's look at what those names mean in Hebrew.

Name	Meaning
Adam	man
Seth	appointed
Enosh	mortal
Kenan	sorrow
Mahalel	the blessed God
Jared	shall come down
Enoch	teaching
Methusaleh	his death shall bring
Lamech	the despairing
Noah	comfort/rest

You really could not make this up! If you don't believe me get hold of a good bible search engine: Bible Gateway, Blue Letter Bible and check it out!

The Old testament is full of what we call Typology. Which means that the plot lines of God's plan are planted into the text to be revealed later – like a good movie!²

¹ Luke 36b-38

² Chronological guide to bible prophesy, Todd Hamposon, p26-27

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The measure of prophecy is if it comes to pass. The last section is a bit more tricky and we will only be able to skim the surface.

So finally let's tackle the issue of inerrancy or accuracy of the bible. Remember the original authors wrote in Hebrew, Aramaic and Koine Greek. We know that language contains many subtleties and nuances that are not easily translatable. So interpretation creeps in – accidentally and deliberately.

Foundationally, I believe what St Paul writes to Timothy:

2 Timothy 3.16-17

All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,

Why?

so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.

Peter in one of his letters gives a warning about human interpretation, perhaps thinking of the Pharisees' use of scripture to oppress the people of Jesus' day.

2 Peter 1.20-22

First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

There are many examples of interpretative translation of the bible that change the meaning of the original text. Here is one regarding women's leadership in the early church.

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Paul uses the Greek word Diakonos, to describe a woman's role in a church in Cenchrae. This word is translated Deacon when applied to a man; it implies authority and leadership.

I have good things to say about Phoebe, who is a leader in the church at Cenchreae³
I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchreae,⁴
Those are from relatively new translations.

In the King James Version the same sentence is translated:

I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea:

Why the difference in the KJV? It says more about the state of women's leadership up to barely a few decades ago. It says less about the accurate and consistent translation of the original language.

In conclusion, I hope that this dive into the scriptures has whetted your appetite to read further and deeper into the Word of God. It is prophetic, yes, but it is also one way that God uses to speak to us.

As we read God's living word in the power of the Holy Spirit, he promises to lead us into all truth, to reveal to us the mind of God and to guide us in our journey of salvation.⁵

³ Contemporary English Version – Bible Gateway - <https://www.biblegateway.com>

⁴ New Revised Standard Version – Bible Gateway - <https://www.biblegateway.com>

⁵ John 16.13