

Do We Know Our Bible?

There's a really old, black and white, wild West movie, made in the late 1950's, starring Jeff Chandler titled "The Plunderers." It's not worth looking for on the Internet or at the library to watch. I mention it because the plot involves a town of innocent people that's being terrorized by a bunch of evil-doers. The main character in the story initially is weak. He suffers physically from the meanness of those bad guys and is painfully humiliated. But then he returns to the story as a victorious hero. He identifies with his townspeople and single-handedly vanquishes the wicked ones. And so the town is delivered from tyranny. It has a happy and intensely moral ending. Don't miss it: This movie's plot is the story of Jesus! It's the story of the Bible in a different setting.

Screenwriters and movie directors of a hundred years ago knew their Bible. And they carried the wonderful story of the Bible into their art. The films they created thus reflected the story of the Bible. Why? Because the Bible was important to them as well as to those who went to the cinemas. And they knew well the story that their Bible told. This film thus (possibly intentionally, as the hero in the story is named Sam Christy) re-creates the story of Jesus, coming first in weakness and humility, suffering apparent defeat, only to return later in time to defeat and destroy evil. And He does it for the sake of the community of helpless human creatures terrorized by Satan and his demons.

It has been said that atheists of a hundred years ago knew their Bibles better than do church-goers today. That's a sad commentary on us. We need to know our Bible better, because to know the Bible is to know God. Ignoring the Word of God is ignoring God. Most people don't realize that the Bible isn't just a book of stories about people and a whole lot of doctrines and how to live a moral life. It actually has an over-arching narrative, a story. And the story comes from God Himself. We should know the story thoroughly, because it comes from God and it's for us.

And it's biblical to teach the story of the Bible to others. Moses retold the story of the Patriarchs for his generation. The Psalmists often reviewed the story of creation. The writing prophets repeatedly reviewed stories from Torah. Ezra retold the Bible's story (up to that point in time, obviously) for the newly resettled community of Jews. Paul often reviewed narratives from the Old Testament for the churches he wrote to. We should be doing the same with the story of the Bible.

The master-story that the Bible tells is on the other side of this paper. There are lots of sub-themes that could be added to it as well. But I've condensed it so it fits on one page. The essentials are all there, in a bit over 500 words. You're free to copy the page and hand copies out to people. If you want to reformat it so it's a tract, you're free to do that too. (I can send it to you as a Word file to make reformatting easier.) Everyone you know, and even those you don't know, *everyone*, needs to know the story of the Bible. It's a life-or-death issue.

Of course atheists will say, Nonsense. They don't (more correctly, they won't) accept that the Bible has an over-arching narrative, a story line that holds it all together with a beginning and an ending. That's because their ability to understand is not just clouded, it's totally absent. The fact that the Bible *does* have a narrative is a powerful argument for its having originated with God. He knows the end from the beginning. He built into His revelation proofs of its divine origin, eg, patterned and proleptic events, prophecies and types. God has made His Word self-attesting. Anyone who is at least a tiny bit thoughtful should be able to perceive that the Bible is vastly more than a collection of moral writings with some history and biography.

The problem seeing the whole narrative is that evangelical pulpit ministry typically preaches on just one passage at a time from here or there in the Bible. So it's difficult to see the whole because of the innumerable parts. We can't see the forest for the trees. We need a birds-eye view to see the whole. And when we do, we can't help but marvel at its beauty and its compelling awesomeness. It's the perfect love story.

The Story the Bible Tells

The Bible is from God, and it's all about God. As He's a spiritual Being, invisible and transcendent, the only way we can know of Him is if He reveals Himself to us. The Bible is that revelation. But that revelation also is in the form of a narrative. And the story goes like this:

God created this world out of nothing. He populated it with animals and with unique creatures made in His image, able to relate to Him. These human creatures were to serve God as His subordinates, exercising rule over His creation. But those initial humans chose instead to rebel against God. Disobeying God, refusing to trust His word, they transferred loyalty to an evil supernatural creature. We, their offspring, now necessarily serve that evil one. Instead of annihilating us, which is what we deserve, God decreed death as a penalty for sin.

So sin entered the human race. We all have a sin nature. That's why our world is filled with violence, injustice, lies, hatred, and so many other vices. Because of our sin, God also pronounced a curse on His very good creation. That's why diseases and disasters occur. But God's love for His human creatures led Him to undertake a mission to rescue and restore us to Himself.

The Old Testament tells how God first chose one particular nation, Israel, to serve Him by taking the knowledge of God to all the other nations. But sadly they failed. The lesson: even knowing how we ought to live to please God, we can't do it in our own power. The sin nature is too compelling. And that evil one, constantly lurking in the background, is too demanding. Something more is needed.

Our sins and rebellion demand eternal punishment, because God's infinite holiness is offended. But instead, in the course of history, God took upon Himself a human form in the person of Jesus and, shockingly, entered His creation. Jesus, Israel's Messiah (Christ) lived a beautiful, sinless life, helping others, revealing God's perfect wisdom and love as no words possibly could. But because of human sin, He was hated and put to death. He suffered and died a death that however had infinite value. On the cross, God substituted Himself for the punishment His beloved humans deserved. As God has eternal life in Himself, death could not hold Jesus, so He rose from the dead and lives today and forever. God's justice was satisfied by that death and resurrection. Thus reconciliation with God is possible. And the forgiveness of all sin is freely offered.

So now people, although still sinners, are able to enter into a relationship with God and be eternally blessed by Him. God sends His Spirit into our lives to empower us to live the kind of life that pleases Him. The Gospel calls us to repent of selfish and sinful living, and live instead in a way that reflects God's goodness and love, which the Bible describes in many places. And in this era, called the Church Age, followers of Christ are commissioned to do what Israel didn't and couldn't do – except that the Church's message is to trust Jesus, the Jewish Messiah, who delivers us from the evil one and takes us safely to God. The plea is to identify with Jesus by trusting in Him and in what He did for us, rescuing us from wrath. Although we die, at some point in the future we'll be resurrected, our sin nature will be removed, and God will transform us to be just like Jesus. And we will be with God, in His presence forever.

Rejecting this narrative, however, means refusing God's love offering and remaining therefore in a rebellious state, identified with that evil one and forever alienated from God. Apart from Jesus, there's no escape from God's fierce indignation. The Bible's story ends well: In the future, the evil one will be eternally punished and evil will have been forever dealt with. And God will restore and re-create all things to reflect His goodness and perfections.

The Bible's story comes from God and is about God. It comes from God by way of certain, select human authors because . . . Hey, how else could it come? And it's about a Lover. It's about a Being who is great and magnificent in every conceivable way. He is infinitely good. He is perfect in holiness, and He's perfect in justice as well as love. He also is infinitely merciful, which is a very good thing for us.

It's also an intensely moral story, a story of good and evil and of choosing sides. No one can be neutral. We're necessarily either on one side, which is God's side, united to Christ Jesus, or on the other side, that of the evil one. We are destined either to salvation and blessing, or to judgment. It has to be this way, because of God's holiness and justice. And because God, having granted us a measure of free will, must hold us accountable for our choices.

And the best part is, the story is true. That's because it's God's story for us. And God does not lie.