

GLEANINGS — August 23, A.D. 2015
Avoiding Bible Blunders, Part One

Last Lord's day's sermon at New Life Church included a warning about one such blunder: failure to consider "the original audience." The whole Bible is God's covenant document for all of His people, to be sure. But to whom was a particular book (or passage) first proclaimed?

Genesis, the primary of the five books of Moses, was given first to the "exodus generation" of Israelites whom Moses led out of bondage. The knowledge that they were to inherit the promised land then occupied by the descendants of Canaan, the cursed son of Ham, was important for them in a way that doesn't obtain for us.

Another example appears in Jesus' Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24; parallel accounts found at Luke 21 and Mark 13). God incarnate gave this important message after He left His old, earthy temple in earthly Jerusalem for the last time. Moved with sorrow and anger as we see in the previous context, Matthew 23:33-39, He told His disciples that not one stone of that temple would be left upon another which would not be thrown down. In answer to their amazed question about that prophecy (fulfilled quite exactly in 70 A.D.), Christ went on to speak to them of things that would come upon THIS GENERATION, i.e. the disciples and their contemporaries.

So, we who live about 3,500 years after Genesis was written, and about 2,000 years after the Olivet discourse was spoken can be edified in our faith, grow in grace, and learn from both portions of Scripture. "For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope" (Romans 15:4). However, to ignore the historical setting of any passage...to fail to consider the identity of its original hearers, is a Bible blunder that can get us off track.

Another blunder can be made if we take "literal" and "truthful" as synonyms. We joyfully confess the comforting truth that the holy Bible is infallible and without any error whatsoever in its original manuscripts. It is fully and finally authoritative because it is the God-breathed (inspired) Word of life.

This does not mean that every statement in Scripture must be taken literally according to the literal meaning of the word literal! The Bible also uses figurative speech to express truth. Jesus said, "These things I have spoken to you in **figurative language**; but the time is coming when I will no longer speak to you in **figurative language**, but I will tell you plainly about the Father" (John 16:25).

Jesus' figurative words (for example, His parables) are no less true than the Bible's literal accounts of historical events like the creation of the universe in six days of ordinary length, the global flood, or the miraculous parting of the Red Sea – in which its waters formed walls to their right and left as the people of God walked through it.

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