BIBLE AND MISSION: THE STORY

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Category: Mission

This is part of a mini-series on the Bible and Mission which draws together my developing thoughts and some of the blog posts I've made over the last few years.

The first main point of this Bible and Mission mini-series is that the **Bible is the story of God's mission**. If you want to know about how God engages with his creation, then you need to read the Bible story. There is nothing complicated about this.Â However, there are a couple of implications which flow from this simple proposition.

Firstly, we need to engage with the whole story of the Bible, not just with isolated excerpts from the New Testament.Â Brian Russel has made this point eloquently on a number of occasions.

> *The Christ following community needs to hear the biblical narrative as a whole proclaimed in a single message or teaching block. Just as many churches regularly preach series on their core values, communities of faith who desire to live out the biblical narrative need to hear it in its totality often. I would recommend beginning each year with a message that succinctly captures the overarching contours of the Bible. (Read this post)*

Or again...

> *It is vital to communicate and teach the grand story of the Scriptures. This is the beginning of a realignment with God. But we have to go deeper. As Christ followers it is vital that we understand the big picture: Creation â€“ Fall â€“ Israel â€“ Jesus the Messiah â€“ Church â€“ New Creation. The next challenge is to begin working through individual passages and books to study them in depth. The true Biblicist is able to gravitate between an eagleâ€™s eye view of the broad shape of the Scriptures and the ground level investigation of its smallest pieces. (Read this post)*

Our reading and studying of the Bible needs to respect the fact that a high proportion of Scripture is narrative and the whole of Scripture adds up to one overarching story.Â In an earlier blog post, I wrote this:

> ***Stories are intrinsically interesting**. However, much Bible teaching moves away from the story format and can become somewhat less than interesting (to put it politely). God gave us stories because thatâ€™s the sort of Bible He wanted us to have. Those of us who teach the Scriptures need to respect the underlying character of Godâ€™s inspiration â€“ we need to tell stories too. Preaching which analyses Bible stories to death, getting every last detail out of them, misses the point. We need creative, interesting Bible teaching which tells Godâ€™s story. The Mark Experiment is one suggestion of a way of doing this â€“ Iâ€™m sure that there are many others. I do, of course, realise that the whole Bible isnâ€™t narrativeÂ and*

> *canâ€™t be taught this way â€“ but most of it is. (Read my complete post)*

We are often rather suspicious of narrative; with a slight suspicion that it is less authoritative than propositional logic.Â We would like the Bible to be a book of systematic theology rather than a narrative. But God gave us the Bible he wants us to have and we should be wary of regarding it otherwise. I've already used this quote from Tom Wright:

> *And we have thereby made the Bible into something which it basically is not. I remember a well-known Preacher saying that he thought a lot of Christians used the Bible as an unsorted edition of Daily Light. It really ought to be arranged into neat little devotional chunks, but it happens to have got all muddled up. The same phenomenon occurs, at a rather different level, when People treat it as an unsorted edition of Calvinâ€™s Institutes, the Westminster Confession, the UCCF Basis of Faith, or the so-called â€˜Four Spiritual Lawsâ€™. (Wright on the authority of the Bible)*

If the Bible tells the story of God's engagement with humanity then we must tell the whole story and not just pick and choose the bits we find interesting. Colin Greene suggests that "many Protestant evangelical readings of the biblical narrative that it can be told without the inclusion of Israel at all" (see post here). This is a trap that I fell into in one of my posts on the purpose of the Bible.

The temptation is to argue that the New Testament tells us all we need for our relationship with God. But an understanding of the whole narrative deepens our insight into that relationship, while also showing us that there is far more to God's mission than 'me and my personal Saviour'. Brian has done us a great service in showing the missional impact of the Old Testament (try this post for an example).Â Tim Davy's Biblical Basis of Mission series has also done a great job of opening up the missional impact of the Old Testament (this is a good starting point).

The last comment I'd like to make on this theme is that Bible translators need to take into account the missional nature of the whole Bible when they are deciding which passages of the Scriptures should be translated for a given people group. The reality is that we are limited by resources and we have to face the question of how much of the Scriptures to translate where. I have already investigated this question:

> *Of course, the reality of life is that sometimes we canâ€™t do everything and we have to make hard choices. However, our translation work should always envisage that at some point the whole of Godâ€™s story should be made available in every language that needs it. Single books, Gospels, mini-Bibles, films; they all have their place, but they canâ€™t replace the whole Bible. God has given us a story and everyone needs to be able to hear that whole story in a language which speaks to them.*

> *Pragmatic considerations about what can be done at any given point and what portions of Scripture are most strategic are important, but in the end, our mission practice must be theologically driven. (Read the whole post)*

There is a little more about how much of the Bible we should translate here.

The two books that I would recommend to anyone who wanted to get to grips with the missional message of Scripture are The mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative and The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story.