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In, chapter two “What the Bible is Not” by Mark Strauss there are four main sections: the Bible is not a magic answer book, the Bible is not a list of commands to obey, the Bible is not a collection of promises to claim, and finally the Bible is not a textbook of systematic theology. In the first section Strauss discusses how people use the Bible to try and find an answer or meaning to a problem in their life. The reason he gives that we shouldn’t do that is because the Bible is not written directly to us. It takes the Bible out of context if we are to read it as a letter to us is Strauss’s Main point.

The second section of this chapter discusses that the bible is not a list of commands to obey. Strauss states that most people do not obey every command that is in the bible because people know that they are not written directly to them. He makes an interesting point that some commands come off universal because it displays an idea of who God is and who we are to him, and the command shows His purpose to us. The next point is that the Bible is not a list of promises to claim.

Like the first two points in the chapter Strauss says that promises in the bible were written for the people in the people in their original context. He goes on to say that promises are “part of God’s self-revelation within the great Story in the Bible.” Finally, the last point is that the Bible is not a textbook of systematic theology. In this section Strauss has three main arguments and they are that the Bible’s theology is progressively revealed, Bible’s theological statements are contextually located, and finally the Bible’s theology is selective not comprehensive.

Looking at Strauss’s main idea is that the bible can’t mean to us what it didn’t mean for that and that ultimately the Bible is not written directly to us. The area that was a shocking statement comes from the section about the Bible is not a magic book. Strauss writes, “Does God speak through random verses taken out of context? As a student of the Word, I have to answer no, since to answer yes is to break the most fundamental rule of Bible study: read the Bible in context. The application of a text must come from its original meaning. To conclude otherwise removes all controls from Bible study and allows anyone to claim an authoritative message from God.”¹

This quote stands out because if I’m being honest, I think that I have been reading the bible with the expectation that God can give me a specific message about my life. Strauss does say that God can do whatever he wants and if He wants to communicate with us in that way then He can. However, Strauss goes on to say that the Bible communicates who God is. It also says that reading the bible does require context and by taking the context it was written we can use it and apply it into our own lives.

This seems like an obvious point but if I’m being honest, I think I would randomly go to the Bible in hopes that God would speak or communicate to me as if He were a genie and not a loving Father. In college, I started making my own index in my bible. If the bible discussed grief, marriage, tithing, anger, or certain topic I would mark a verse under that topics section. That way when I needed verses that dealt with a particular topic I knew where to go. This may be a better way of using God’s word. I have understood that these verses are written for me but about a subject that we as humans deal with. The index helps me to easily find how God helped others in the past and give me hope or wisdom for my own scenario.

¹ Mark L Strauss. *How to Read the Bible in Changing Times: Understanding and Applying God's Word Today*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011.