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Reflection Paper

## How to Read the Bible in Changing Times - Chapter 2 Overview

Chapter 2 of Strauss work “The Bible in Changing Times” provides a perspective on what the Bible is not. The chapter takes a deeper look at common misconceptions of the Bible, which has forced readers to take the intended meaning out of context and in some cases have led to the misuse of the Bible and its scriptures. The 4 ways which Strauss expands on highlight that the Bible is not 1) a magic-answer book 2) a list of commands to obey 3) a collection of promises to claim and 4) a test of systematic theology. Within each of these Strauss stresses the importance to change our perspective when reading the Bible; to look at it from a vantage point that the Bible was not written to us but for us. When we look at from this lens, we are forced to look at the context in which the Bible is written. When reading the Bible, we must look at the location, setting, cultural, societal context. We must also look at the intended audience to help glean God’s intended meaning. When we take a step back to frame the scriptures within its appropriate context, we can learn the true nature of God, what is our intended relationship with Him and how we ought to live out of lives. When we do not do this and when we take the scripture out of context it “...removes all control from Bible study and allows anyone to claim an authoritative message from God...if the passage meant one thing to its original audience, then it should not be applied in a different way today” (Strauss 17-18).

I do, however, have an acute disagreement in Strauss point of view that sometimes when individuals point to a specific verse of scripture and apply it to their lives, the application can be a stretch and often misinterpreted. He uses the two examples of the pastor’s wife in Texas and his own personal experience with his father. In both cases, these individuals take scripture out of its original context and frame the scripture as a sign that it is God’s giving them direction to do something or make a change in their lives. Strauss point of view on this aligns to the theme of the section that the Bible is not a magic-answer book. That in both instances, if they looked at the full context of these verses then both individuals would realize that the intended meaning had nothing to do with their circumstance. To this point I do disagree. Strauss point of view seems subjective. I do believe that sometimes God speaks to us through the Bible and specific passages. I understand the importance of making sure that we should look at the Bible and its scripture with the lens of context, location, audience etc. But that is not to say that God can draw us to things in the Bible to deliver a message or meaning to us for our lives. It is important that when things are drawn to these passages, we don’t jump to conclusion, but we pray that God continues to reveal his intended meaning. We must also factor in the other things in our lives that maybe drawing us to God’s purpose and will for our lives. I do not think we should discount when those specific passages come into play, but we should supplement them with continued prayer and patience for the Holy Spirit to speak to our hearts so that we can better discern our purpose.

In a contradicting vein, Strauss point of ensuring that we look at the context of the passage and remind ourselves that the Bible was written for us and not to us *does* help answer a common question that I am faced with when discussing the Bible with nonbelievers. A common question I get from non-believers are around the scriptures that talk about slavery or women

submission to their husband; both subjects causing them to steer away from the Bible. They ask, “how can we look at the Bible when it was written so long and some of the things are no longer applicable to us”. I think Strauss puts it perfectly to remind ourselves and the non-believer that the Bible is so that we can learn the nature of God, our relationship with Him and His purpose for the world. Scripture should be looked at through a lens of context so that there is not a need to try to marry the customs and practices of ancient world with today’s every changing society. Strauss highlights that “[d]iscerning when and how these commands apply to us involves discerning the heart of God behind the text” (Strauss 22). It is looking at the scripture from a God filled lens so that we can capture what are the universal commands, principles and promises that are meant for us to take away.

In summary, I do agree that it is important to look at the context of Scripture, however, that is not to say that God does not speak to us through Scripture even when in context it might seem unapplicable. God can do all things and it is not our call to determine whether He does something or not.