

Fighting a Good Fight – Handling Scriptural Criticism

We have been talking about this theme of pursuing crown and how to do that, and the past few lessons have focused on fighting a good fight.

We, too, face battles like David and Jonathan did, but ours are of the verbal kind. They are battles over words, particularly over the Word of God. The Word of God is the sword that we carry into battle, but the enemy seeks ways to blunt that sword, just as the Philistines found ways to blunt Israel's weapons. A sword is only effective if it has an edge.

It takes skill and a great deal of courage to face an antagonist in a battle over the Word of God. Some of us are like Jonathan. We have been through these battles before, and we may have more extensive knowledge of the Word and can meet an enemy sword for sword. Others of us are like David. We have a simpler knowledge and skill level in formal battle and may not be able to meet the enemy sword for sword, *but* we can meet them stone for sword and still be just as effective.

So, let's discuss one argument that critics often hit us with, and that is the supposed "inconsistencies" in the Biblical text, and we will use Chapters 16-18 as a case in point.

The argument: There are inconsistencies in the text, therefore, "other authors" must have written different segments

Critics love to point out that this text that we tout as the inspired Word of God is full of contradictions and "inconsistencies." They will then argue that the Word of God is the work of many authors and also many editors who, over the years, have redacted and revised portions of the text.

In regards to many authors, it is true that the Bible as a whole is a compilation of writings from different authors over the years. The Spirit of God inspired the original authors, and they delivered the text as it was meant to be read without need for man's addition, redaction, or revision. Having begun in the Spirit, the text has not been perfected by man's judgment or effort. We are warned against adding or removing text from God's Word. Biblical transcriptionists have been exceedingly exacting in maintaining the integrity of the text, and while errors in copying may have occurred, they do not affect the overall intent of the passages, nor do they alter passages in their entirety.

The problem occurs when the critics start using this "other author" argument in order to reconcile what they consider to be discrepancies in the text, and this will be an inconsistency in their argument. They will say that Samuel wrote this first part of First Samuel, but when they get to chapter 17 and find the repetition of information and seeming inconsistency with the previous chapter, they will say "another author wrote this part of the account."

There begins the dilution of God's word away from an inspired work and into something that man wrote over history, revised and redacted and even expanded as history unfolded. It becomes the way they begin to explain away prophetic Scripture by saying "other authors" wrote parts at later dates in history after the prophetic word had been fulfilled. The "other authors" argument opens up the Scripture to man's inspiration instead of God's inspiration.

You can't just throw in the "other author" argument whenever it seems to suit a difficulty in the text.

That is the blunting of the sword of the Word of God.

Critics will look at the redundancies and consider them to be without purpose.

That is a blunting of the sword of the Word of God.

There is an explanation for the seeming “inconsistencies” in chapters 16-18, but you will not understand this unless I explain how the Old Testament was meant to be studied. So, I going to sharpen your sword today with a deeper explanation, and give you some stones for slinging at this enemy argument.

How to Study the Old Testament

God established this method back in Genesis 1:2-4.

“Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. So the evening and the morning were the first day.” - Genesis 1:3-5 NKJV

In the beginning, God created the light and made a determination about it. The light was good. He then separated it from the darkness, creating two pictures with a relationship between them. What could be known of the character of the light was understood by its contrast to the character of darkness, and vice versa.

An understanding of the Old Testament is achieved a continuous comparison of pictures for the purpose of separating what is good from what is bad, what is right from what is wrong. Enlightenment comes from putting two things side by side and considering what they tell you about each other. The comparisons or contrasts can be between physical things, actions people take, or two passages that picture similar things or contrasting things.

This is the difference between the Old and New Testaments. The New Testament will tell you this is right and that is wrong and this is why. It explains and clarifies. But the Old Testament presents you with two pictures and asks you to decide which is right and which is wrong and why.

So how do you know what to compare to what?

Look for what the Scripture itself pairs together, first in the immediate verse, then between groupings of passages in the greater context of the book. Also look for repeated phrases that pull different passages into context with one another.

The goal is to:

1) **Understand the character of something by comparing it with something else.**

Sometimes the Scripture compares things of **similar** kind—firstborn son to firstborn son, a barren woman to a fruitful woman, priests to priests, kings to kings, etc. Picture elements of like kind establish patterns that carry forward.

Sometimes it sets up **opposites**, like a lowly shepherd boy and an exalted giant.

2) **Identify the relationship between them.** The Old Testament is ultimately a study of relationships. The relationships are like ratios. They remain the same whether they are applied in a limited context or a large context, and the physical is a reflection of the spiritual.

The relationships become the basis for making analogies: A is to B as C is to D. Husband is to wife as Christ is to the Church. The relationship transcends the physical into the spiritual.

On your handout, *Comparing the Picture Blocks of Kings in First Samuel*, I have broken down the chapters into picture blocks, chapter by chapter, so that we can see how Samuel makes use of picture blocks when structuring his narrative. (Go through the chart).

Comparing Picture Blocks of Two Kings in First Samuel

SAUL

Chapter 9	Introduction of Saul	A	Chapter 10	Saul's anointing	A	Chapter 11	Jabesh Gilead seeks a champion to fight the Ammonites	B1	Chapter 12	Samuel's address at Saul's coronation	B5	Chapter 13	Jonathan's battle #1 with the Amalekites	C1	Chapter 14	Jonathan's battle #2 with the Amalekites	C2	Chapter 15	Saul's battle with Agag and the Amalekites	C3
	Saul's journey			The people acknowledged Saul's kingship			Saul is at home	B2		Israel knits itself in covenant to a new king			Saul's unlawful sacrifice			Saul's rash oath			Saul's disobedience	
	Saul meets Samuel at the feast	A					Saul's battle with Nahash	B3					Saul loses the eternal crown			Saul establishes himself over the temporal			Saul loses the temporal crown	
							Confrontation with those who didn't recognize Saul as king	B4					No weapons							
							Saul's celebration/coronation	B5												

DAVID

Chapter 16	Samuel meets David at the feast	A	Chapter 17	Israel seeks a champion to fight the Philistines	B1	Chapter 18	Jonathan loves David; Jonathan knits himself in covenant with David	B5	Chapter 19	Saul persecutes David	F	Chapter 20	David flees . . .	G
	David's anointing and receiving of the Spirit (ascent)	D		David is at home	B2		David's celebration/acknowledged by the people			Jonathan intervenes			Jonathan must decide between two kings	
	Saul's distressing spirit (descent)	D		David's battle with Goliath & the Philistines	B3					David flees and escapes			Three-day test	
	David meets Saul; Saul loves David			David confronts the man who didn't recognize him	B4					Michal intervenes				
										David flees and escapes				
										The Spirit intervenes				

D Contrast (ascent/descent).
The connection is made by the phrasing between verses 13 & 14:

"The Spirit of the LORD came upon . . .
The Spirit of the LORD departed . . ."

E Passage broken into a series of threes (David increases/Saul is afraid of David)

F Passage broken into a series of threes (Interventions/David flees). The last third is broken into four parts

G Passage broken into three stages

Let's consider the critics' argument again. They say that the reason Saul does not know David in Chapter 17 after he became Saul's harpist in Chapter 16 is because a different author must have written the David and Goliath account.

How do we reconcile the inconsistency without using the "other author" argument?

Very simply. We know Samuel is a very exacting writer who structures his accounts very carefully, and he is known to forgo a linear timeline in favor of chiasmic structures, inclusios, and parallelism. This is why I have made it a point to stress Samuel's way of structuring his narratives. If he deviates from a timeline, it is because there is another literary structure in play.

1 Samuel 17-18:7 is an example of a **parallelism**. The passage is written as a self-contained parallel picture to be compared with Chapter 11-12. The parallel establishes a pattern that points to Christ. We already discussed how Saul's rise to kingship parallels Christ's narrative. David is a type of Christ and so it is necessary that he should follow a similar pattern.

You have to compare apples to apples.

Also, biblical authors often pick and choose elements out of a timeline that fit a particular theme they are following. We see this same thing happen with the four Gospel accounts. All four reference the same timeline, and yet the authors don't necessarily hold to a strict linear order of events because they are painting different pictures of Christ.

Five Smooth Stones

You can meet a sword with a sword and answer their arguments with a deeper knowledge if you have it. Or you can deflate an argument by poking a hole in it—creating some doubt that makes them step back and think.

So, here are five smooth stones you can cast at an antagonist who challenges you about inconsistencies like this in the Scriptural text.

- Ask them: "Why do you assume the Bible is structured in only a linear timeline order?"
- "If the narrative doesn't follow a timeline order, it is usually because the author is using another literary structure."
- "Details are repeated to create parallels with other pictures."
- "The author may be drawing out select parts of the timeline to build his theme."
- "The Old Testament is about building and comparing pictures. You may not be comparing the right pictures."

That will give most of them pause because they won't know about the Bible's literary structures—but you do, because I taught you about chiasmic structures and inclusios and now parallelisms. This is why I teach you these things—so that when you face this enemy argument, you might be able to speak boldly from knowledge of God's Word. I have just given you five smooth stones. They don't require you to explain everything. They merely poke holes in the argument.

Inconsistency with the Septuagint (Greek version of the Old Testament)

This issue over what to do with inconsistencies goes back to the earliest translations.

All the verses in chapters 17 and 18 where these “inconsistencies” occur in David’s narrative are omitted from the Septuagint (Greek version). The omissions include the repeated details about David’s family along with all of David’s discussion on the battlefield with the men about the reward and Eliab’s rebuke of David. The Septuagint cuts out verse 12 to verse 31.

The Septuagint also cuts out Saul’s conversation with Abner in verses 55-58, and verses 1-5 of chapter 18 where it talks about Jonathan’s heart being knit to David—a detail that crops up again a couple chapters from now.

While the details in the Hebrew seem redundant, the Septuagint loses the parallelisms by omitting them.

Now back to our narrative . . .

Saul Fears David

Read First Samuel 18:7-30

4. What begins Saul’s turn of heart away from David?

5. What did Saul have to be jealous about?

6. In verse 10, it says that under the influence of the distressing spirit, Saul prophesied. Is his prophesying a divine act of revealing God’s inspired instruction?

7. What are Saul’s schemes to get rid of David, and how do they turn out?

Read First Samuel 18:17-30.

8. Why does Saul give Merab instead to another man?

9. What do we know about Michal?

10. What is the reason David gives for not marrying Michal?

11. What bride price does Saul set on Michal?

12. Why does David agree to do this? Why bind himself in marriage to the house of Saul?

13. Why does Saul fear David?

And so we see the pattern of ascent and descent similar to the account of Samuel versus Eli. Saul goes from loving David to eyeing him suspiciously to finally counting him as a perpetual enemy. There is no more hiding of Saul's animosity.

Interventions, Chapter 19

Just as chapter 18 was divided up into two sets of three—three accounts of David's success set off by three accounts of Saul's fear—this chapter is divided up into another series of threes. This time we have three interventions with the last intervention divided into four stages. Each intervention is separated by the phrase that David "fled and escaped."

Verses 1-9 describe Jonathan's intervention.

Verse 10 says that David "fled and escaped."

Verses 11-17 describe Michal's intervention in deceiving her father.

Verse 18 says that David "fled and escaped."

Verses 19-24 describe the Spirit's intervention in bring Saul to his knees.

Chapter 20 begins with "*Then David fled . . .*" finishing the series, but also leading into a major turning point.

Jonathan's Intervention

Read First Samuel 19:1-10.

14. Where does the first intervention take place?

15. How does Jonathan intervene on David's behalf?

16. What sets Saul off again?

Michal's Intervention

Read First Samuel 19:11-17.

17. Where does the second intervention take place?

18. How does Michal intervene on David's behalf?

The Spirit's Intervention

Read First Samuel 19:18-24.

19. Where does David flee?

20. What happens when Saul sends his deputies after David?

Application

Chapters 18-19 focus on the ascent of David and the descent of Saul, with the focus more on Saul than on David. David is in the narrative, but he is more of a passive catalyst for Saul's extreme emotions and actions. There is an interesting interplay of power, love, a sound mind, and fear on display in these passages, and should remind us of what Paul tells Timothy.

"For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind." -
Second Timothy 1:7

Using Saul as a case study, let's examine the dynamic of Second Timothy 1:7.

Fear is a negative emotion that progresses in stages from guilt, to worry, to anxiety, and finally to paranoia in its extremity.

Fear and power: Instead of feeling empowered, fear makes a person feel powerless.

- In what ways did Saul become powerless?

- How does Saul try to take back the power?

Fear and love: Instead of feeling love, fear makes a person incapable of giving or receiving love. Saul started out loving David, but fear twisted that love into hate and jealousy.

- What is jealousy?

- A person can be jealous over possessions or glory, but jealousy can also infect human relationships. How does jealousy affect love?

Fear and a sound mind: A fearful person does not exercise sound judgment because fear and panic drive his decision-making. It will make a person do what is right in their own eyes and seek their own personal good over the greater mission. Saul's lack of a sound mind is clearly evidenced in these chapters, particularly under the influence of the distressing spirit.

There are right and wrong crowns to pursue. When you pursue an earthly crown, it becomes a possession to be grasped by our own power and will. Fear quickly enters into the equation.

There are right and wrong ways to pursue a crown.

There are right and wrong reasons for pursuing a crown.

How do we battle fear in ourselves?