

EVERYTHING IN THE BIBLE ISN'T ABOUT JESUS¹

(Michael S. Heiser)

If you've been a Christian for very long or raised in a Christian church, chances are that you've heard that the Bible is really about Jesus. That cliché has some truth to it, but it's misleading.

The truth is that there's a lot in the Bible that isn't about Jesus. Procedures for diagnosing and treating leprosy (Lev. 13:1-14:57) aren't about Jesus. Laws forbidding people who've had sex or lost blood (Lev. 15) from entering sacred space aren't about Jesus. The spiritual, social, and moral corruption in the days of the Judges (Judg, 17-21) wasn't put in the Bible to tell us about Jesus. The Tower of Babel incident (Gen, 11:1-9) doesn't point us to Jesus. When Ezra commanded Jews who'd returned from exile to divorce the gentile women they'd married (Ezra 9-10), he wasn't foreshadowing anything about Jesus.

The point is straightforward: No Israelite would have thought of a messianic deliverer when reading these or many other passages. And no New Testament writer alludes to them to explain who Jesus was or what he said.

So why is this idea so prevalent?

In my experience, the prevailing motivation seems to be offered to encourage people to read their Bibles. That's a good incentive. But it may also serve as an excuse to avoid the hard work of figuring out what's really going on in many passages. People are taught to extrapolate what they read to some point of connection with the life and ministry of Jesus—no matter how foreign to Jesus the passage appears. ***Imagination isn't a good method for interpreting the Bible.*** (Emphasis added) Not only does it lack boundaries that prevent flawed interpretations, and even heresies, but it makes Scripture serve our ability to be clever.

Recognizing the inaccuracy of this assumption is important for a few simple but important reasons. First, if we filter passages that aren't about Jesus through something Jesus did and said, we can't hope to understand what those passages are actually about and why God had them in the Bible in the first place. Second, the assumption can lead to minimizing or ignoring passages in which we can't clearly see Jesus. When Jesus isn't "clear" in a given passage, and we've been taught that it's somehow about him, it's easy to just give up and let pastors and others tell us what they "see." Every passage in the Bible is there for a reason. If we want to understand Scripture, we need to let it be what it is and discover its true context.



¹ This is taken from a book I highly recommend, *Brief Insights on Mastering the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), pp.37-38.