

HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 11/11/2022

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

Division is not unique to our country nor to this time in history. There has always been division, both politically and geographically. This is reflected in many parts of the Bible. Though we may think of Israel as being a united country/kingdom, throughout its history there has been much that divided it. In particular, there is often distinction between the northern kingdom called Israel and the southern kingdom called Judah. Though these two areas together comprised the twelve lands that made up the Promised Land and together were often referred to as Israel, there was also a clear sense of separate identities by the north and the south that, again, can be found in the written record recorded in Scripture.

Take, for example, the two creation stories in Genesis: chapter 1:1-2:3 and chapter 2:4-25. The first story was handed down by those who lived in the south and the second by those who lived in the north. I know that tradition says that Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible (including the narrative of his own death and burial—maybe GOD told him in advance). Still, it is apparent that there were at least four authors or writer groups who contributed to these five books, even within Genesis. For example, if Moses wrote all of Genesis, why did he suddenly change from referring to GOD as YAHWEH (Genesis 1:1-2:3) to using ELOHIM, translated as the LORD GOD. That's like writing a letter to your Aunt Judy and then for no reason start calling her Mrs. Smith. Further, if Moses was the author of all of Genesis, why is the order of creation different from the first narrative to the second? The obvious answer is different authors.

Knowing the background of the writers can help us interpret or at least consider the implications of what is written. Why did the southern kingdom tell their story in the more poetic fashion that they did and why in the order we have in Genesis 1? Why did the northern kingdom recite their story in way they did? We don't have obvious answers to these questions except that the first story seems to focus more on GOD'S act of creating while the second concentrates more on relationships, like those between Adam and Eve, and between humans and GOD. That, in turn, might teach us something about the culture and priorities of those two regions.

Another place where we note this division is in the writing of 1 and 2 Chronicles, 1 and 2 Kings, and 1 and 2 Samuel. These books record the history of Israel (the whole nation). But Chronicles is how the southern region recorded it and Kings and Samuel is how the northern kingdom wrote. And they're pretty close to the same, but with some exceptions, like the fact that in the southern version the story of King David doesn't mention his affair with Bathsheba and, when it came out that she was pregnant from him, David ordering her husband, General Uriah, to lead the troops into battle in such a way that he was sure to be killed. You see, David was from the tribe of Judah in the southern kingdom and they were kinder in the narration of his story. The northern region wasn't as fond of David so they included more of his failings than did his home town folks. It's sort of like the desire in our country of people in the South to hang on to those things that recall those individuals who represented their side in the Civil War. Imagine how southern historians would have written about Abraham Lincoln if the South had won.

We tell stories in part to recall our history and in part to present truths. It's good to think about the perspectives and biases of those tell the stories we hear. We never fully get the actual facts because we

remember and tell them from our unique memory. Even within families, members may recall an event differently and may even become upset with how a story is remembered and presented, especially when the main reason for telling it comes into conflict. Sometimes it doesn't matter whose version is correct (or more correct). It is important to listen to why it is told the way it is and to consider what it is that matters to the person telling it. Doing this can help us to identify issues that lie below the surface, which can then bring us to more valuable conversation about what is truly important to each other. That, in turn, can lead to greater understanding and unity between diverse groups. And that should be our ultimate goal.

In CHRIST'S love,
Pastor Jeffrey