

Freshening Up Your Bible Study with Dr. Jim Coakley

Color

Introduction

Here we are in the Fall season when we think about the change of color in the leaves as winter approaches. Authors sometimes use colors as a way to make the text more vivid and enhance the way the account is told and sometimes are used symbolically. Books like Baum's "The Wizard of Oz", Crane's "Red Badge of Courage" or Poe's "The Raven" use colors in various ways and show creativity and literary artistry.

Color Definition

In subtle but significant ways Biblical authors use colors in the background of the telling of accounts that add a dimension to how readers should be viewing the text or characters within the text. It is helpful to keep in mind that in Bible times adding color to clothes and objects was typically an expensive proposition (i.e. Lydia a seller of "purple dye")

Examples:

1. Broad use of colors

- Rainbow (Noah's Flood, Ezekiel 1 Vision reflects God's presence and provision)
- Tabernacle (God's tent is a wonderland of colors like the garden of Eden)

2. Single use of colors

- Gold – superiority "head of Gold" magnificence, wealth and God's presence Rev 21:18, 21
- Red – symbolism of blood representing both death and redemption
- White – purity (Isa 1:18, Dan 7:9) or death (Leprosy made one look pale like one close to death (Miriam Num 12:10))

3. Individuals

- Esau is "red" (Gen 25:25) and the father of Edom the "red land"
- David is "ruddy" (1 Sam 16:12) unclear if it meant he had "red hair" or ruddy from being outdoors.

4. Jacob's use of Color

- Jacob uses Red to manipulate his red brother Esau Gen 25
- Jacob uses white to manipulate his "white" uncle Laban (Laban means "white") Gen 27
- The use of colors show Jacob to be superstitious using colors to manipulate others in voodoo fashion.

5. Book of Esther's use of Color

- Esther 1:6 with Esther 8:15 the same colors used to reflect the grandeur of Persia are now associated with honoring Mordecai

Conclusion: Colors are used in the Bible not only symbolically but also as a means to characterize certain people with certain traits. Our awareness of color enhances our insights while reading the Biblical text