

Survey of the Bible Introduction

In studying the bible it is our custom to take what is called an expositional, exegetical approach, which means that we study verses in the immediate context and then take those verses in their context and determine what the actual words and phrases are saying to arrive at the author's actual intent.

More times than not most bible teachers and pastors will take a passage of Scripture and use that as a springboard to teach on a subject that may or may not agree with the author's original intent.

For example someone might choose this passage to teach on giving to your local church.

Mark 12:42-44 ⁴² A poor widow came and put in two ¹small copper coins, which amount to a ²cent. ⁴³ Calling His disciples to Him, He said to them, "Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all ¹the contributors to the treasury; ⁴⁴ for they all put in out of their ¹surplus, but she, out of her poverty, put in all she owned, ²all she had ^ato live on."

This particular passage certainly can tug on our heartstrings on how even a poor woman with little means can love her church, or synagogue in this case, to the point that she was willing to give even of her last cent to show her love to God and her church.

The message then might go on to explain how we too should love God and our church to the point where we should be imitating the attitude of this poor widow.

And this kind of sermon could include a myriad of stories and other examples of how people in the church should give sacrificially to their church, after all it takes a lot of money to run a church and pay for the pastors Mercedes Benz.

You never have to go back to this passage in Mark once you've established what it is you are trying to accomplish, in this case encouraging the church to give more of their money.

Now, don't misunderstand me here. I do contend that we as believers should be contributing to the furtherance of the gospel of Jesus Christ and to the ministry of His church, but if we are going to be true to passages of the bible, and what they are actually teaching then we need to rightly divide the word of God, as the KJV puts it.

That verse in the KJV could actually be better translated in this way.

2 Timothy 2:15 ¹⁵ Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.

Accurately handling the word of truth must not be relegated to plucking a passage out of its context and making applications that the original author never intended.

Having said that this doesn't mean we can't teach topically and use passages to support our position. But going back to the passage in Mark let's look at the premise, which is, because this poor widow gave everything she had, therefore so should we. Let's see if the actual context teaches that. Let's put it in some sort of context.

Mark 12:38-44 ³⁸ In His teaching He was saying: "Beware of the scribes who like to walk around in long robes, and *like* respectful greetings in the market places, ³⁹ and chief seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets, ⁴⁰ who devour widows' houses, and for appearance's sake offer long prayers; these will receive greater condemnation." ⁴¹ And He sat down opposite the treasury, and *began* observing how the people were putting money into the treasury; and many rich people were putting in large sums. ⁴² A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which amount to a cent. ⁴³ Calling His disciples to Him, He said to them, "Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the contributors to the treasury; ⁴⁴ for they all put in out of their surplus, but she, out of her poverty, put in all she owned, all she had to live on."

The context here has to do with the scribes who are demanding respect, and then are showing themselves to be hypocrites when it comes to the practice of giving money to the synagogue. They give what appears to be lots of money when in fact it is a drop in the bucket in comparison to their wealth.

Their hearts are out of accord to their pocketbooks, whereas the heart of this woman is seen in a different way, not because of any outward motivation, like the scribes wanting attention, but because she simply wants to please God.

The passage is certainly addressing money, but unlike the former attitude of someone wanting to teach that simply because this

widow gave all that she had and so should we, the context is really dealing with a heart attitude.

2 Corinthians 9:6-11 ⁶ Now this *I say*, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷ Each one *must do* just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸ And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed; ⁹ as it is written, "HE SCATTERED ABROAD, HE GAVE TO THE POOR, HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS ENDURES FOREVER." ¹⁰ Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness; ¹¹ you will be enriched in everything for all liberality, which through us is producing thanksgiving to God.

Matthew 6:20-21 ²⁰ "But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; ²¹ for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

And so, when we teach the word of God we need to be faithful to accurately handle the word of truth.

But for our purposes here for the next few weeks, we are not going to be teaching in an exclusively expository or exegetical sense because what we are going to do is give an overview of the word of God, not a detailed look at a particular passage, unless I decide to slow down and smell the roses as I am inclined to do on occasion.

So, the question is, why would we do that? If we have an opportunity to look extensively at the word why look at it in an overview way? The reason is to get a sense of the forest so we can appreciate individual trees.

The forest we're looking at is the bible. The individual trees that make up this forest are 66 individual trees as the Western church looks at this; 39 O.T. books and 27 N.T. books.

I qualify that because if you are a Jew you do not count 39 O.T. books. You would say there are 24 books according to the Talmud. And the way they do that is to count the 12 minor prophets as one book. Samuel, Kings and Chronicles, each as one book, (no first or

second Samuel, or first and second Kings, and no first and second Chronicles.)

And then they would lump Ezra and Nehemiah together as one book, and in this way they have 24 books.

This is less of a problem with the N.T. though there have been those who would have excluded certain books from the list we know today adding up to 27. But there really is even a bigger issue we need to address before diving into these books and what they contain.

The real issue is the one William Hendrickson in his book, *Survey of the Bible*, raises. "Is the entire bible, as originally written, the word of God, and that all of its teaching is trustworthy."

You see you can arrive at the right books that make up the bible, but unless the bible is the only truly inspired book given to men by the Creator of the universe to reveal His will, then they are just another compilation of writings that are essentially no different from the Quran, the Pearl of Great Price of Mormon Fame, or the writings of the Jehovah's Witnesses, Watch Tower.

So, before we move to a survey of the bible I thought we would deal with the reliability of the bible as the only inspired word of God, and no other. And by this I don't mean to suggest that there aren't translations of the bible that have mistakes. Translations of the original writings, known as the autographs, can certainly have mistakes, but not in overall content and intent.

For example, the edition of the KJV which was published in 1701 had an amusing error. The verse should read:

Psalm 119:161 ¹⁶¹ Princes persecute me without cause, But my heart stands in awe of Your words.

In the 1701 KJV it reads, "Printers have persecuted me without a cause."

So, does a mistake like this invalidate the word of God? Of course not. There is a difference between the work of men and the work of God.

But we need to deal with how we ended up with what we know today as the Hebrew Bible and the N.T. Scriptures which Christians believe to be one full revelation by God the Creator.

The first thing we need to acknowledge is that the original writings, which as I said earlier are called the autographs, no longer exist. They haven't existed for thousands of years in the case of the O.T and probably for a little less than two thousand years with the N.T.

Instead what we have, be it the Old or New Testaments are copies of the originals. But how does a copy qualify as the word of God?

In the same way that a copy of anything can reflect the original. And so, one issue becomes the reliability of the copyists. But if that were the bottom line we could still argue that man's involvement could and would alter the original in such a way that we could never reliably know that what we are reading is the actual word of God, which leads to another important aspect of God's word. God's ability to preserve what He delivered.

If God has spoken to people in this world instructing them to write what He tells them to write, is it reasonable that He would watch over them to make sure that what they wrote was precisely what He wanted them to write?

Numbers 12:6-8 ⁶ He said, "Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the LORD, shall make Myself known to him in a vision. I shall speak with him in a dream. ⁷ "Not so, with My servant Moses, He is faithful in all My household; ⁸ With him I speak mouth to mouth, Even openly, and not in dark sayings, And he beholds the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid To speak against My servant, against Moses?"

Here God makes it clear that whether Moses or other prophets of God speak, they in turn must speak His words to the people as we see in Deuteronomy.

Deuteronomy 4:10-14 ¹⁰ "*Remember* the day you stood before the LORD your God at Horeb, when the LORD said to me, 'Assemble the people to Me, that I may let them hear My words so they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children.' ¹¹ "You came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, and the mountain burned with fire to the *very* heart of the heavens: darkness, cloud and thick gloom. ¹² "Then the LORD spoke to you from the midst of the fire; you heard the sound of words, but you saw no form-- only a voice. ¹³ "So He declared to you His covenant which He commanded you to perform, *that is*, the Ten Commandments; and He wrote them on

two tablets of stone. ¹⁴ "The LORD commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and judgments, that you might perform them in the land where you are going over to possess it.

Here we see the words of God being transferred to a medium that was stone. These are written words, but they are God's words, not man's word. And these words were to not only be conveyed to God's people, but to be taught to the children, which is to say the parents were working with a written word to accomplish this.

Deuteronomy 18:18-20 ¹⁸ 'I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. ¹⁹ 'It shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require *it* of him. ²⁰ 'But the prophet who speaks a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.'

Proverbs 30:5-6 ⁵ Every word of God is tested; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him. ⁶ Do not add to His words Or He will reprove you, and you will be proved a liar.

Psalms 119:89 ⁸⁹ Forever, O LORD, Your word is settled in heaven.

Is there anything in just these few passages that doesn't strongly suggest that the written word of God will be guarded by God Himself as to its delivery to men?

Revelation 22:18-21 ¹⁸ I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; ¹⁹ and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book. ²⁰ He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming quickly." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. ²¹ The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.

If we truly believe that God has a vested interest in His own word then it stands to reason that even though the last words were delivered by God some 2,000 years ago to His apostles that He would make sure that they would endure in the form that would not alter His message.

Now, does this mean that the message has not been altered at times in history as a result of man's infallibility in attempting to copy the Scriptures?

One work comes to mind. Watch Tower Bible. But is the Watch Tower Bible a true translation of the Word of God?

Only to the degree that it has faithfully copied from the manuscripts that have been handed down to us. When they purposely stray from the Hebrew and Greek manuscripts to promote their religious ideas they fall into that category that John speaks of in the book of Revelation.

But what about the manuscripts that were originally copied from the autographs? Most of the original copies, the ones that Paul instructed the churches to pass on to other churches didn't survive. But the copies of the copies have survived and it is from these later copies that we are able to come up with what God gave to the apostles.

But again, why trust these copies if they are not the originals? Because God's protective hand over His own word has been to make sure that all generations of people will have the reliable word and will of God that will determine the eternal destinies of men.

Isaiah 40:8 ⁸ The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever.

What word was Isaiah talking about?

The Old Testament.

1 Peter 1:22-25 ²² Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, ²³ for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, *that is*, through the living and enduring word of God. ²⁴ For, "ALL FLESH IS LIKE GRASS, AND ALL ITS GLORY LIKE THE FLOWER OF GRASS. THE GRASS WITHERS, AND THE FLOWER FALLS OFF, ²⁵ BUT THE WORD OF THE LORD ENDURES FOREVER." And this is the word which was preached to you.

What word is Peter talking about?

The Old and New Testaments. The gospels and much of Paul's writings to the church were already being disseminated to the

church and we saw last week that Peter acknowledges that what Paul was writing to the churches was the very word of God.

2 Peter 3:15-16 ¹⁵ and regard the patience of our Lord *as* salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, ¹⁶ as also in all *his* letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as *they do* also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.

So, why do we have so many different bible translations? Are they all correct? And how were they translated? Is the bible you have in your hand essentially the same word of God that Peter and Paul and the early saints had in their hands?

Next week we'll take a look at this and see why it is important to know where you got your bible. Because if this word is not reliable then you can't trust any part of it. We can't pick and choose what we will determine is truth and what is fable.

But there needs to be a standard from which every translation is derived and we'll look at that next time as well.