

The Big Picture of a Survey

The last time we got together we discussed the issue of studying particular passages in context as opposed to doing an overarching approach to the Scriptures. The former is dealing with one author in one book and one particular passage that may have only one topic at one particular juncture of that book.

The other approach that we'll be dealing with is what we call a survey of the entire Bible. A Survey is often employed to give an overall sense of the big picture of anything. For example we may do a survey of the city of Port Charlotte in such a fashion as to get a sense of all of the street locations in the city and how they intersect each other at any particular point.

That would be different from concentrating on one street or even one particular address on that street.

What would be the advantage of having a survey of the city of Port Charlotte that is wider in scope as opposed to only looking at one street?

It would enable you to be able to get from point A to point B with some ease. We would call this a map. In our recent trip to the NE if we had not had a map it would have been nearly impossible to navigate the roads to arrive at a particular destination, and in fact we ran into that problem when we didn't have a reliable map, but rather depended on the general information we were getting from the locals, who seemed to always use the tunnel as their reference.

And so, a survey of this type gives us not only the big picture, but it is really the only way you can get from the big picture to a specific point on that map. And so, when we do a survey of the bible what we are really doing is getting the map of the big picture in place so that we can fully understand and appreciate specific points on that map.

For example, when we come to the book of Genesis we see many instances of sacrificing of animals with people such as Abel, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And so, on the broader map we see the introduction of the concept of atonement.

But unless we use that broader map to lead us to a specific house on a specific street, namely Calvary, if I may use such a connection, then we would never really understand or appreciate

why God had those men submit to such sacrifices in the book of Genesis.

We might use another example found in the book of Numbers.

Numbers 21:5-9 ⁵ The people spoke against God and Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this miserable food." ⁶ The LORD sent fiery serpents among the people and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. ⁷ So the people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned, because we have spoken against the LORD and you; intercede with the LORD, that He may remove the serpents from us." And Moses interceded for the people. ⁸ Then the LORD said to Moses, "Make a fiery *serpent*, and set it on a standard; and it shall come about, that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, he will live." ⁹ And Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on the standard; and it came about, that if a serpent bit any man, when he looked to the bronze serpent, he lived.

Now if we look at this portion of the map without understanding where that map was leading us, it would be very easy to conclude that salvation is merely the employment of making a bronze statue that resembles a serpent and sticking it on a pole.

But when we know where that map is leading us and we know the specific address on that map to look at then the map makes sense. And of course the destination on that map once again leads us to Calvary.

^{NAU} **John 3:14** "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up;

So, again, with map in hand we can appreciate the destination much more and traveling the roads of this map we can begin to see the land in which we live and the way to navigate it successfully so that we arrive at our destination in a way that gives glory to the map maker.

And this leads us to the real issue of this map. Because depending on who constructed this map will determine if it's reliable in the first place.

Again, let me ask you, when we talk about this map what are we actually addressing?

We're addressing the word of God.

Now, we use the phrase, word of God, as Christians, all of the time. But there is something fundamental here that we have a tendency to take for granted which leads to this question.

What is the word of God?

It is the Creator's communicating with His creation concerning His specific will for those creatures.

But this still doesn't answer the question, what is the word of God, because communication can occur in a variety of ways.

For example, if I tell you that my father was a W.W II fighter pilot between the years 1942 and 1945 have I communicated to you something about my father?

But what if my father were here right now and began describing his own experiences about his time in the service. Would that be communication about my father?

What's the difference between the two when both means of communication are talking about the same person and the same set of truths?

One is the original person talking and the other is a second person describing the original person. Both are legitimate ways to communicate events about a person.

But whose information ultimately has the greater weight?

The original person.

In today's culture of higher criticism of the bible, when we talk about the word of God in light of such criticism, who is usually credited with creating what we call the bible in that culture setting?

The individuals who penned those works, be it Paul, or Peter or any of the prophets. And so, according to these "higher critics," what we end up with are the words of men, not the word of God.

And so, whenever you have words of men what is fundamental about their authority and truthfulness?

It is always susceptible to flaws.

And so, is it any wonder that in most of our seminaries today that students of the bible are actually taught to question the bible as to what parts are reliable and what parts are not.

For example. In most “Evangelical” seminaries in the world today evolution is taught as truth. In other words, whether full blown humanistic evolution or theistic evolution, what is the premise for one species advancing to the next level of life?

That the creature has the inherent ability to advance itself without the aid of an outside power and intelligence.

Humanistic evolution says no outside intelligence was involved while theistic evolution credits God with simply giving the spark to life and allowing life, over billions of years to evolve on its own to what finally ends up with man.

Let's assume theistic evolution is true and that there is a God who simply started life on its course with one cell and it then took on a life of its own.

If the bible is simply a compilation of stories by men then when the bible says, God said, let there be light, let there be earth, let there be a man and these appeared in the course of only one day, is it not possible to conclude that these men were using language to speak to the peers of their day in a way to describe life in its most simple terms since such people were so simple in their understanding?

Let's not complicate the story of life with all of the scientific facts that those people simply could not know or understand. And so a simple story will due until which time people catch up to the truth we know today as evolution.

But here's the problem. If we're going to call the bible the word of God when in fact men wrote these stories to simply give their opinions of how they thought life began then can we really call the bible the word of God?

And if the bible is really the word of men then what part of the bible do we believe?

But more importantly can we believe any of it as the word of God when in fact it is the word of men?

We then find ourselves in the most unenviable position that Paul spoke of when addressing the Corinthians about the subject of resurrection.

1 Corinthians 15:16-19 ¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; ¹⁷ and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. ¹⁹ If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.

If God's word is not actually words from God the Creator of all things, then we are living in a fantasy world. And trust me, we should be pitied as the pitiful gullible people we are.

So, let's talk about God's word.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 ¹⁶ All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

How does that verse read in the NIV?

^{NIV} **2 Timothy 3:16** All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,

^{ESV} **2 Timothy 3:16** All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,

The Greek word for inspired as is used in the NAS, KJV and the NKJV is the word *theopneustos*.

Now, you don't need to be a Greek scholar to see what this Greek word is actually saying. This word is made up of two words. *Theos* and *pneustos* which is a derivative of *pneuma*.

The word *Theos* is a word we know in our English language with such words as theology.

And what is theology?

The study of God. And so, *Theos* is the greek word for God. The word *pneuma* and its derivative here in 2Tim is a word that is used elsewhere as in 2Thess.

^{NAU} **2 Thessalonians 2:8** Then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His ¹coming;

The word breath is the word *pneuma*.

And so, when we put these two words together, *Theos* and *Pneustos* what be a literal translation?

God-breathed. And this leads to another question. What could be the difference between God-breathed and the phrase, “inspired by God” when it comes to the Scriptures?

In the English language the word inspired can mean, “to be influenced by.” For example, I was inspired to write my memoirs after reading the memoirs of Abraham Lincoln.

With that kind of inspiration what is the source of my memoirs?

Me. I’m the one doing the writing. And so, are they the words of Abraham Lincoln?

In fact, this is exactly how many view the Scriptures. They may acknowledge God as being an inspiration in your life, but if you are writing the words with that kind of inspiration are they necessarily God’s words?

But if the words you write are God-breathed what can be the only source of those words?

God’s words. And unless you and I start at that point then a survey of the bible or for that matter a study of any particular passage in Scripture is at best something only inspired by God and may contain some of God’s words, or at worst an inspiration that allows only for the words of man and his thoughts.

At that point it can only leave the believer with doubt and confusion as to which part of the bible we can trust and which is reliable if any.

Let’s talk about God and communication. If God is God and Creator and He has in fact created man in His image and set man on the earth out of which He made man, is it logical that

He would then communicate to man about who He is and what He has done and for what purpose?

If God were to communicate with man what would be the means by which He would do that?

Language. And what language would God have used to communicate with man in the very beginning?

Whatever language God had programmed into man at the time. Keep in mind that Adam and Eve were created with the ability to immediately communicate with each other in a common language. They didn't have to learn a language. It was designed by God into them.

And so, if God is capable of communicating with man and man is capable of understanding God is it logical at some point that God would communicate with man even after he sinned?

If God is capable of communicating with man and has the will to communicate how might He ensure that those words would be available to a larger audience?

By passing those words on either through verbal communication or by written word. We know God did both.

Genesis 9:8-11 ⁸ Then God spoke to Noah and to his sons with him, saying, ⁹ "Now behold, I Myself do establish My covenant with you, and with your descendants after you; ¹⁰ and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you; of all that comes out of the ark, even every beast of the earth. ¹¹ "I establish My covenant with you; and all flesh shall never again be cut off by the water of the flood, neither shall there again be a flood to destroy the earth."

Here God simply speaks.

But how do we know He spoke?

Because Moses wrote those words down for us at the command of God.

Exodus 34:27 ²⁷ Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write down these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel."

And so, we have the spoken word and the written word. The spoken word was put to pen and thus became the written word. But whose words are they?

God's. They came from God's mouth. They are in fact God-breathed.

Numbers 11:23-25 ²³ The LORD said to Moses, "Is the LORD'S power limited? Now you shall see whether My word will come true for you or not." ²⁴ So Moses went out and told the people the words of the LORD. Also, he gathered seventy men of the elders of the people, and stationed them around the tent. ²⁵ Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke to him; and He took of the Spirit who was upon him and placed *Him* upon the seventy elders. And when the Spirit rested upon them, they prophesied. But they did not do *it* again.

Isaiah 55:9-11 ⁹ "For *as* the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts. ¹⁰ "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, And do not return there without watering the earth And making it bear and sprout, And furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; ¹¹ So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding *in the matter* for which I sent it.

Unless you and I fully understand what we are reading when we read the Bible, as only the words which God has desired that we should have in our possession, we will always question which part is God's and which part is man's.

Next week we will look at which part is man's because God has ordained that man play a role in the word of God. But that role in no way diminishes whether or not we have God's actual words in our possession thousands of years after the prophets and apostles wrote these words down for us.