

Putting 2 and 2 Together...And Coming Up With One!

By Gerald Cumby

The subject matter sounds quite intriguing and yearning for someone's listening ear and attentive heart.

The Word of God is much like the subject matter. When you place all of the passages of Scripture together, one can see that there really is one thought in the mind of God...that being, "God's Glory Revealed to His Creation (man included)."

My idea is that the synthetic approach to Bible study does just that. It puts all of the Scriptures in place in order to reveal the central theme. The central theme is the basis for all of the inner parts coming together to picture the love of God for man and that He was and is willing to do anything to bring man into his kingdom and into His family. Yet, He did not or will not force His will on mankind to accomplish total appeasement for man to come into fellowship with Him. Choices by man are not only relevant, but permanently set by man as he makes the choices in the few years man has on this earth (God's created place for human life).

The synthetic Bible study method includes the view of placing various parts of the Bible that relate to one another in order to constitute the whole. Since the word "synthetic" expresses the idea of combining two or more things together, the synthetic Bible study would mean the method of gathering related information from the main or general thought/conclusion. Actually, it moves from the general to the specifics that make up the whole. It is, in fact, a telescopic method of study in lieu of the microscopic.

In the Bible the whole is more than the aggregate of the parts, just as the living body is more than an assemblage of limbs, cells, nerves, etc. I would like to think that the synthetic approach to Bible study is an approach like the synthetic study of geography, i.e. begin with the hemispheres, then to continents, on to countries, cities, towns and villages. This would mean that the redemptive revelation (revealing of God's redemptive plan for His creation) is considered *initial* before Christ; is *central* in Christ; and is final from Christ. It has a starting-point, a track, and a goal. To break it down even more can be seen by understanding that the revelation of the Bible begins in a *Garden*, and ends in a *City*, and the record of the slow progress from simplicity to complexity lies between. This can be seen in the *Garden* where God's creation lives in fellowship with God himself, to a city where there are no flaws, simply perfection where a Holy and Just God, His Son, and the Spirit live in perfect harmony with the faithful and "Redeemed" of mankind. The process of God's creation failing to live by God's law in this perfected land created and approved by God, to the redemptive plan of God to bring His creation back to Him lies in between the perfect, unflawed Garden and the pure, Holy city without spot or wrinkle.

One of the great theologians of the Bible, Martin Luther, stated that he studied the Bible as he gathered apples. First of all he shook the tree, then the limbs, then the branches, and after that he searched under the leaves for any remaining fruit. This is a great example of the synthetic approach to Bible study.

With all of the above in mind, the synthetic method in Bible study demands that we get a mental grasp of the Bible as a whole, eliminating all artificial divisions and arrangements. In this way only can we discern the unity of the Scriptures.

With this in mind, let us look at the “Synthetic Overview of the Bible. Over the course of many centuries, the Scriptures came into being...from different authors, social settings, and geographical locations. Scripture is written in three different languages and has numerous literary genres/types. Therefore, to study the Bible and understand the synthetic overarching themes requires analytical as well as prayerful insight. This can only be received through the Holy Spirit’s touch and approval of man’s diligent, serious study; as well as man’s own desire to hear God’s Word and, by faith, accepts God’s Word by practical and sincere godly living.

It should further be understood that we are to humble ourselves with a contrite heart and ask for our eyes, ears, mind, and spirit to be open to God’s revelation. Psalm 119:18 states, “Open thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.”

Biblical theologians have a variety of ways to state what they feel the over-all theme (unbroken tie/thread) running through the Old and New Testaments. Some state that the key integrating themes are: covenant/promise and fulfillment, the kingdom of God, God’s Glory, reconciliation, and redemption. Others stress:

- the relationship of Scripture’s various parts to Jesus Christ,
- the similarities between biblical statements of the past and confessional statements that have arisen in the history of the church,

- and, the proper center of biblical theology as being God Himself or His mighty Acts of deliverance.

Although most of these theories or themes could be valid in one's view or idea of Biblical structure, **the central theme is "God's Glory."** Man's view, although applicable and worthy, simply does not matter. **God's view of what is important...is what is important!** Whether it is God's people praying, God's people praising, or God's people procrastinating and rebelling, **God will get the Glory and His plan of redemption will, in the end, be exhibited in His Omnipotence, Power, Glory and Might. He will be exalted!** It is our responsibility to get on His terms and seek to help in His presentation and purpose for what and whom He created all this for...Himself. We are just recipients of His glorious love.

Here is a progressive theme that I think is presented in God's Word, the Bible:

The early chapters of Genesis corroborates the fact that by subsequent statements in both the Old and New Testament, God created the world by arbitrary order or decree, "And God said...." Hebrews 11:3 also declares, "By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible" (NIV). In other words, He did not make it out of pre-existing matter. **Give God the Glory!**

"The creation of all things is ascribed in the Bible to God, and is the only reasonable account of the origin of the world."¹

God then brought male and female (human kind) into His created world as was God's intention from the beginning. There was great communication between man and God. God saw that it was very good. **Give God the Glory!**

¹ William Smith, Smith's Bible Dictionary, page 127.

Evil's origin began when God's creation (Adam and Eve) rebelled, disobeyed. Mankind, because of their disobedience, was estranged from God....and their future, along with all of God's creatures, was marked with pain and woe. However, the curse of sin is altered and made better (a hope) by a God who seeks sinners to redeem them. God's majesty in creation is, if anything, exceeded by His grace in redemption. **To God be the Glory!**

Mankind refuses to exalt God throughout the first part of Genesis, resulting in their depravity and corruption with the potential for their annihilation....but Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. God destroys humankind and the rest of the living things with exception of a remnant which included Noah and his kin. God covenants (establishes an agreement with terms under which a redemptive relationship to Him rather than judgment is possible....with the remnant), Genesis 9:1-17. This was a foreshadow of the covenant made with Abraham lying in the future. **To God be the Glory!**

Despite God's covenant initiative, mankind continues to rebel (Tower of Babel) and God confuses communication between man...and spreads the people to all other parts of the earth.

"The confusion of tongues occurred in the 4th generation after the flood....which was 101 years after the flood, and 326 years before the call of Abraham (Genesis 10:26)."²

However, God's determination to save is greater still. He chooses Abraham through whom to redeem His people (chosen people, Israel) whereby all the nations of the earth are to be blessed. The Jews, the chosen seed, through

² Henry Halley, Halley's Bible Handbook, page 83.

whom Christ is a direct descendent... (from Abraham to Jesus, Savior of mankind). A covenant is made with God and Abraham (Genesis 12:3). **To God be the Glory!**

Abraham is saved through his faith and trust in God. Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son in response to God's command foreshadows God's own willingness to sacrifice His Son for salvation of mankind...now and in the future...until He redeems us as a bride, adorned for her husband. Even Sarah (Abraham's wife) conception of a son at the age of 90 is a picture of the resurrection of the dead (Romans 4:17-25).

"The return of Christ has an important implication for the believer because it means the hope of the bodily resurrection. The resurrection hope is taught in both the Old and New Testament and is foundational to the Christian faith."³

To God be the Glory!

Through Abraham's descendants (Isaac and Jacob) the covenant promise God made with Abraham was kept. From Jacob's sons, come the twelve tribes of Israel. Through the youngest of the 12 sons, Joseph, the message and covenant/promise is preserved. The Israelites (God's chosen people), because of their rebellion, spent 400 years in captivity in Egypt. Genesis closes with a promise from Joseph to his brothers, that what they intended for harm, God has turned it to good wherein the God's plan can be accomplished. As this book is closing, let us not forget that God will not, nor ever will forget the covenant made with Abraham. God will see the plan completed....without fail. **To God be the Glory!**

³ Paul Enns, The Moody Handbook of Theology, page 376.

Moses arises to lead God's people out of their bondage in Egypt due to God's own initiative and power. Their deliverance is the result of God's covenant with Abraham (Genesis 12:3; Exodus 2:24). Divine deliverance by a Holy God delivers them out of the hands of the Egyptians. Great and mighty acts by God cause the people to realize that God is at work in their favor. God gives a vehicle for their living within the Abrahamic covenant by giving the law (Ten Commandments) wherein they were to follow. But they again grumble and complain and fail to heed God's warnings and initiatives. "The basic dynamic of God's people honoring their Lord through fidelity to His revealed written Word is basic to the faith that both Old Testament and New Testament prescribes."⁴ Moses, a precursor of the Messiah, took the law and through Aaron and the priesthood, the blood sacrifices were extended for the remission of sin for all the people of God. However, these bloody sacrifices could not furnish individual atonement for sins any more than adhering to the legal requirements of the Mosaic moral code. These sacrifices and legal requirements were continuing reminders of God's disapproval of sin and His offer of reconciliation to the contrite and repentant heart.

The five Old Testament Books of Moses give us a picture of God's pattern of reconciliation and His desire to have fellowship with His creation. He continually remembered His covenant with His people. **To God be the Glory!**

God gave a place (land) for a people (the Israelites) to become a nation. Joshua took the responsibility in taking the children of Israel over to the Promised Land.

⁴ Robert W. Yarbrough, Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology, Article on Biblical Theology. Paragraph 20. <http://bible.crosswalk.com>

Even as God continued to show His chosen people His power and promises fulfilled over and over, the people continue to sin and rebel. From the time of Saul, Israel's first king, to the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., God works through kings and their subject people to achieve His plan. Through it all, God continues to rise up and bless leaders who are charged with guiding God's people in God's ways. **To God be the Glory!**

Even at Israel's peak of success, they still failed to meet the high calling of God. David comes on the scene and his reign is the foretelling of the messianic reign (kingdom) itself. David is a man after God's heart only because he was willing to repent of the sins that he willfully and selfishly committed (all sins are acts in which man has chosen of his own accord to commit). With a contrite heart, David appeals to His God and God hears. God makes a covenant with David whereby God promises that his (David's) throne would be established forever.

Jesus, as David's descendant, will sit on David's throne when He reigns in the Millennium (2 Sam. 7:16; Ps. 89:3-4, 28-29)...Jesus' reign over the nation Israel as her King will begin in the Millennium and continue on into the eternal state..”⁵

During the monarchy, prophets consistently warn Israel and its kings of the consequences of sin. Nathan rebuked David for his detestable sins; Ahijah speaks to Solomon's times; and Elijah and Elisha minister to the northern kingdom of Israel after splitting away from Judah to the south (following Solomon's reign). The drift that God's prophets decry is documented by writing prophets like Isaiah, Hosea, Micah, and Amos. The Northern kingdom falls to

⁵ Mal Couch, An Introduction to Classical Evangelical hermeneutics, page 327.

Assyria in 722 B.C. because of sin and worship of other gods. The Southern kingdom is favored for a short season due to spiritual awakenings and repentance under contrite and noble kings like Hezekiah and Josiah. However, the Southern kingdom falls (586 B.C.) after failing to give God the credit for all the things He has done for them. In Babylonian captivity, Jeremiah bemoans the despondency of God's people. He does this without a visible sign of any deliverance in the future.....until God reminds him and gives him a hope (Jeremiah 31) which is grounded in God's revelation and covenant promise of redemption. Inspired by these prophets (Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel), small bands of God's people begin to return from Babylon to rebuild Jerusalem (around 520 B.C.). Haggai, Zechariah, Nehemiah and Ezra, all start to work on the rebuilding of the City of God (Jerusalem). The last book of the Old Testament gives testimony to their labor. However, Malachi speaks to the people with a call to repentance because the people were divided and they were not giving full allegiance to the God who has promised them a land. Malachi strongly decries the people in their unwillingness to seek God's will for their lives. He still upholds the promise of vindication of all who turn to the covenant God in repentance and trust Him for a deliverer (Malachi 4) whose life and testimony will furnish the means of their vindication. **To God be the Glory**...Malachi also states that the deliverer will provide eternal judgment to those indifferent to the covenant.

The period between the close of the Old Testament times and the New Testament saw Israel in exile and under different rule (overlords). During this time Judaism in its distinct, and somewhat radical form, was part of the Israelites

life. At the time of the New Testament writings, Judaism had gone far beyond the 10 commandments God had addressed and presented to His people. Rules, traditions, man's rules of law and man's specific do's and don'ts became so important to the religious Jewish leaders, they forgot the most important rule of all, "*love the Lord thy God with all your heart, soul, and mind.*"

The Dark Days spoken of by Isaiah had come. Jesus, the Messiah, came on the scene. **Give God the Glory!**

In Jesus of Nazareth, God's deliverance and fulfillment arrive. The one who was graphically and prophetically prefigured in Old Testament writings is now actually on the scene. John the Baptist claims in a "voice crying from the wilderness" that there is One coming after him that would be "the king prophesied by all God's prophets." God's people are excited and Jesus appears on the scene. Jesus preaches repentance and the coming of God's Kingdom.

However, unlike John, who pointed to another Messiah, Jesus calls men and women to Him...saying that He has been sent from God. **To God be the Glory!**

Jesus preaches and ministers for some three years throughout the lands of Galilee, Judea, Samaria, and surrounding areas and towns. Special attention is paid to the twelve apostles (chosen by Jesus) who are to carry on His work after He is gone. Jesus calls out to all those who would listen (mainly to the Jewish masses). It should be understood that Jesus' messages were preached to the ethnic Jews, but as we know today...the message was applicable to all peoples. His message did not appeal to the Jewish leaders and religious Pharisees.

Jesus' message was that He was the Messiah, God's Son...and that He had

come to deliver His people...and this was a blasphemous declaration in the Jewish religious leaders' ears. All four gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) specifically center in on Jesus' coming to fulfill Old Testament prophecies, His atoning death and living proof of His resurrection. **To God be the Glory!**

Jesus ministry and life was the crowning blow to Satan's plan to establish his own kingdom ("crushed his head" as stated in Genesis) ...and Jesus' death, burial and resurrection was the culmination of God's redemption plan for man established in Old Testament times. **To God be the Glory!**

Jesus established the church to be the focal point for the Father's ongoing redemptive presence. He did this through the Spirit and is still doing it through godly people who are in the power of the Spirit of God...until the return of His Son, Jesus.

The Book of Acts (better stated, the Acts of the Apostles and Followers of Jesus) describes how this ongoing redemptive plan continues for the next three decades following Christ. The New Testament epistles instruct and lead the post-resurrection people of God; and of course, these same writings are a godly and Spirit approved guide for today and all future generations.

The original disciples of Jesus played central roles in ensuring the church's early increase in converts and the church's rise to prominence. Although the disciples and early convert's to Jesus were savagely persecuted for their faith in Jesus, their dispersion to other areas of the world at that time was a fulfillment of the covenant message of blessing all the peoples of the world. Each preached to a new world of listeners who became followers. However, it was the conversion

and ministry of Paul that took the message of the Gospel to Jew and Gentile alike. His message was eloquently and boldly taken to the cultured as well as the uncultured world. His message of salvation by grace through faith, his truth preached concerning the ongoing place of Israel (the apple of God's eye) in the divine plan of God, the mission of the Church, the sanctity of marriage and the sex roles God ordained, and the workings of the Holy Spirit are priceless gifts to the Church and to all the Children of God (those that have placed their faith and trust in Jesus, God's Son)...Jews and Gentiles alike.

The spiritual descendants of these apostles and saved Gentiles still look for the manifestation of the kingdom Jesus promised to establish as His 2nd coming. All wait for the day as we continue to worship and grow in grace and knowledge that Jesus and Scripture impart.

Both the Old and New Testament (especially Ezekiel, Daniel, and Revelation) furnish us with a glimpse of things to come. These glimpses, through the revealing Word, help us to know that time is short and we must continue to *"press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me (us) heavenward in Christ Jesus"* (Philippians 3:14).

As stated in the last words and last invitation by our Lord Jesus,

"And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" (Revelation 22:17). *The Lord Jesus Christ, ever*

concerned for the souls of lost men, closes His great revelation to the churches with a challenge for individual men to call upon His name.⁶

To God be the Glory!

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⁶ Tim LaHaye, *Revelation Illustrated and Made Plain*, page 322.

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