

The Contextual Universe

Part Two

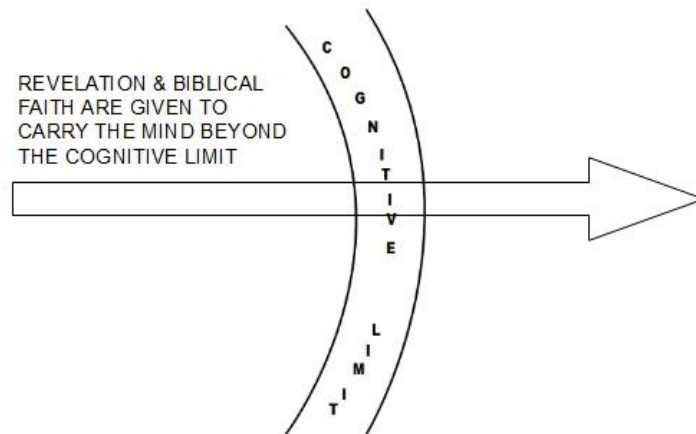
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This is part two of a series that explores the pan-Scriptural concept that the temporal dimension --and by extension, the universe itself --and our experience of it, have a role in our thinking. However, that role is never as the context for a believer's thought, speech and behavior. Several steps help a Christian implement the concepts.

Step One

Actuate the first truth:

The temporal order, our experience, and our situations are not the context for the mind; but there is a singular context, the reality of God.



Numbers 13 and 14 remind us that revelation and subsequent Biblical faith have as their function to carry the human mind beyond the cognitive limit. As the graphic above shows, if the arrow does cross that limit and the mind obeys, then behavior will do so as well.

In Numbers, we see this played out as Joshua and Caleb showed that what they knew from God (revelation concerning the taking of the Promised Land) had this purpose and function. On the forty-day scouting mission they observed and talked about what they saw. Even as they were experiencing and cataloguing the riches and challenges of the land, they constantly operated beyond the cognitive limit in their thought, speech, and behavior. They showed that if one doesn't actuate this first truth, nothing moves or changes.

Now, this first truth does not displace the central role of the cross and other vital things. But it does lead us to why to believe, and why to follow those essentials.

On the other hand, what would a faith look like which did not and could not cross the cognitive limit? That was the case with the Israelite camp and the other ten spies. In fact, that was the entire Israelite nation, which through its history, with very few exceptions, was committed to *not* crossing the cognitive limit and thus not actuating the first truth.

Axiom: We are not allowed, when building life on faith, to ourselves add meaning to experience. Faith prohibits that. But many things do seek to add meaning to experience. This happened at Kadesh Barnea.

In our contemporary experience, some things would seem to have the ability to add meaning to experience. An example of this is depression.

However, human experience doesn't have inherent meaning. We must respect that fact. Thus, consequently, it is wrong to add meaning to experience except that meaning derived from the absolute context.

There are other conditions of mind which seem to add meaning to experience:

- Disillusionment – the thought exemplified by the faithless Israelites who said that not only would they lose if fighting against the enemy, they would have been better off to have died themselves. This is the province of crushed dreams.
- Fear. This is a powerful factor. This is why Joshua and Caleb admonished the others not to fear.
- Human desires. Our own wants and supposed needs often add wrong meanings to our experience.
- Anger adds wrong meaning to experience.
- Frustration

This first truth, which must be activated, is fundamental and basic, but we in the churches ignore it.

Furthermore, all critical representations are leveraged by Scripture. An example of this is Numbers 13:30, where a fully-leveraged statement was offered to the people by Caleb. "We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can surely do it." There are three parts to this fully-leveraged statement.

- 1) *We should go up.* They recommended urgent action. The people were descending into disillusionment (14:1 and following.) But Caleb urged them to initiate hostilities, commit to battle; in fact, to force a condition of no turning back, closing all other options, forcing a point of no return. By revealing themselves to the enemy and broadcasting their intentions, this would draw a line in the sand so that they couldn't turn back. This was frightening to the people.

They didn't want to give up their options—in fact, that is why they wanted to go back to Egypt, and why they wanted to get rid of their leadership. But for Caleb, the context was not the universe nor any experience, but rather the reality of God. The people objected, just as we object, when the Lord forces us into positions of no return.

- 2) *TAKE possession of the land.* The taking of the land was a concept that was far beyond the natural scope of Israelite strength. Both Joshua and Caleb knew that too. They were offering a course of action that was unconstrained by any natural obstacles. But people who only speak in terms of what they can see always also talk in terms of natural obstacles in a difficult situation. But the idea wasn't just from Caleb's own mind. It had a basis in what God had previously said about the situation, even before the first borders into the land were crossed. It was like Abraham, who reasoned toward a resurrection when he was asked to take his son Isaac to the mountain of sacrifice.

Is it wise to operate on ideas that ignore all obstacles? What does this kind of operation say about the legitimacy of the obstacles? The people of Numbers refused to ignore natural obstacles that should have been seen as surmountable—with God's help. How do we refused to ignore natural obstacles today? We do it by saying that something "is not feasible." Yet Joshua and Caleb didn't mince words, and it must have hit them like a ton of bricks, this short and succinct statement: Take possession of the land.

- 3) *We can certainly do it.* Caleb believed the Lord is the engine that drives the history of the nation. We must make a distinction between human involvement and human causation, which are not the same thing. The people would be involved in the taking of the land, but they wouldn't be causative. There was a clear line from the beginning between the two. But today we often believe involvement to be causative (else why would we see the help of a doctor or lawyer first?) Is involvement causal? The Scripture says no. In all the cases, for instance, where they were called to go to battle, it was clear that God would give the victory. The level of human involvement that Caleb called for – declaring war on a "superior" force – was high, but could never be causative. Everyone knew how costly this could be, from the spies to the people. Joshua and Caleb didn't shun involvement. But it was strategic involvement, not marginal; and up to this point mostly their faith had been passive. They had watched the activity of Moses, had witnessed the miracles. But in Numbers 14, the Lord says His miracles were for passive observers to see what the causation was. But now they have to get involved with an act of the will, strap on a sword and go to battle against that superior force. At the Red Sea, they had to just wait. When they had no water, they had to just wait. Now being put into position of being very active— they didn't like that at all. They in essence asked, what is the point of involvement? They saw no purpose or meaning in getting involved, since involvement was surely doomed to futility.

But our involvement carries us beyond the cognitive limit: That's the point. Our involvement is necessary – but not determinant.

Number 13:26-29, 14:1-4. These verses see the people melting into complete disillusionment. The Lord asks, what's the difference between being in Egypt and being here? What is the difference between complete disillusionment and faithlessness? *None.*

We are not allowed to add meaning to a situation. But when you instead generalize from Scripture about a situation, you let that generalization carry you beyond the cognitive limit. And that's why people resist the concept of generalizing, because it always carries people beyond the cognitive limit.

Involvement is not about what you or I do-- but what God is doing. In 2 Chronicles 20, the people learned that to go to battle won't cause anything. It was all about what God was and is doing. This of course changes our concept of causation. Such a posture of faith prohibits pro-ing and con-ing situations, like they did at Kadesh.

We see this in the call of Jeremiah in chapter 1 of his prophecy. Jeremiah was told not to calculate his risks and dangers, just to do what he was told. He was to go past the point of no return and give up calculating involvement forever.

Unfortunately today we often have a faith that fits within the cognitive limit. We practice things that don't produce conflict between that cognitive limit and our experience, like the ways we relate to baptism as a ritual and the Lord's Supper as just a means of showing obedience and fellowship.

In Caleb's three-part statement, he put the people in this dramatic position of saying you have to initiate activate the first truth, and secondly now you are going to produce a narrative. This narrative won't rest on the back of experience but on the back of an absolute truth. And that's a pattern: Activate the first truth, and start a narrative; make all your statements leveraged by Scripture.

With all emotions that are representations of fear, the Lord says force the issue. Do what He says. All representations have to be leveraged by the Word of God. That's why Caleb said, we should go up, pass the point of no return, force the issue. The land is good, Caleb reasoned with them, and if the Lord is pleased with us He will get involved directly. He will cause the protection of our enemies to disappear, but we can't do it alone. Don't rebel against Him, represent things as He would represent them. Don't be afraid, which means don't add meaning to what He has represented. Live by faith and you won't be forgotten by Him. But--refuse to live by faith and you'll buckle under the pressure.

Faith cannot be formulated except beyond the cognitive limit. We know the Lord is involved with us, but we must move beyond letting the universe and our experience of it being context for our thought, speech and behavior. In the times of Caleb and Joshua to

now, we must go beyond the cognitive limit and use only the reality of God as the absolute context for everything.