

THE CHRISTADELPHIAN  
**TIDINGS**  
of the Kingdom of God

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# The CHRISTADELPHIAN TIDINGS of the Kingdom of God

Peter Hemingray, Editor

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# Introduction to Special Inspiration Issue

## The Bible

Our society in North America has largely been trained to distrust authority in any form, an attitude we see reflected almost every day in the news. Whether it be politicians, the press, lawyers, religious leaders, or business tycoons, all seem to figure in our headlines, and normally to their detriment. Thus it is not surprising that when we refer to the Bible as an authority which governs our lives as well as our hope, many, especially the young, express skepticism.

The bedrock of our beliefs is trust in the message contained in the Bible. Not only the message, but the whole of the Bible, must be regarded as trustworthy, as infallible, for who can say, if some part is in error, which parts are true? In our Christadelphian community, disputes concerning this called forth a resolution passed by the Birmingham Ecclesia in 1885 which said:

“That this Ecclesia believes that the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, which now exist in all languages, were originally produced, in all parts of them, by inspiration of God, in this sense, namely, that the Holy Spirit moved and guided the writers either to use their own words conveying information of which they had no knowledge, or to record their own knowledge in words which it superintended; or to adopt and incorporate from outside sources whatever it might approve or require to be recorded for its own purposes — the writers being in no case left to their own unaided efforts, and the result being that their writing was free from error.”<sup>1</sup>

This is, I believe, quite a good description of the way our community understands the inspiration of the Bible. We believe in verbal inspiration, but not in the sense the Bible was dictated to the various writers of the 66 books of the Bible. (Of course, some passages record what is said to be the words of God, but we cannot know for certain whether these are actual “words,” or ideas which the writers transcribed under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.)

## Contradictions

Some will still insist that there are errors or contradictions in the Bible: but a careful study will show almost all such can be ascribed to either a misunderstanding of the text, or an apparent error in the many generations in copying of the text. There might, indeed, be a few errors or contradictions we do not understand, but they are so few we can rest in the comfort that all relevant knowledge is not yet revealed to humankind. Indeed, over the years discoveries in archeology, ancient history, and science have helped to illuminate and explain many formerly apparent contradictions.

It must also be pointed out that it is not necessary to come up with what is necessarily a “true” answer to any of the claimed contradictions. We cannot **prove** contradictions do not exist: Instead, all that is required of us is to come up with plausible, reasonable, or possible explanations, so that what is purported to be a

contradiction is in fact not such in reality. Whether or not our explanation is the “true” one is not all that relevant in such contexts.

### **Outline of the issue**

I must acknowledge that this issue was put together almost entirely by the efforts of Bre. Randy Davenport and Ted Sleeper, who encouraged a large number of other brothers to contribute their expertise and time. I thank all involved, and pray God will bless their combined efforts in addressing this vital topic of inspiration.

This issue is designed to introduce some evidence for the authority of the Bible, as a whole, not just some selected parts. It presents a few snapshots of such areas as:

- The Old and New Testament claims for the way God has inspired the writers to put forth His words.
- The way Divine Inspiration is, and has been, regarded by Christadelphians.
- Several proofs, from prophecy to creation, showing the ways history and the world around us offers proof of the veracity of the Bible.
- A brief consideration of some evidence to be found in archeology.
- A sample of the way to handle apparent contradictions in the Bible.
- How we got our Bible: the account of the way the books of both the Old and New Testament were recognized as inspired.
- And finally, why we can put our trust in the Bible as the true word of God.

### **Conclusion**

It is hoped the Special Issue will let us look at the Bible we have, in whatever translation we use, in its true light: as an invaluable guide given to us by God, to guide us in the way we should lead our life. After all, the gift of eternal life we seek and hope for is indeed a treasure for which we “*press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*” (Phil 3:14).

The message one can take from this whole series of articles is that, as has been said more than once, “I want to make one thing clear at the outset. I am not here to defend the Bible. You don’t need to defend a lion in a fair fight. Let it loose and it is well able to look after itself.” There might be obscurities: there might be passages we find hard to understand or appreciate: but the overwhelming message of Truth rings clear and loud. No one who has read the Bible with an open mind can fail to discern the inherent simple message: it is the only true authority we have in this day and age.

So our challenge is to accept the truth in this inspired word of God, to study it for ourselves, and to draw from it both hope for our future and guidance for our lives. Let us pray this challenge is something we will all accept, both individually and as a community. We can get distracted from this goal by the challenges of our life, both individually and ecclesially. Let us all strive to shake off these distractions, and concentrate on these inspired words.

*Peter Hemingray*

#### **Notes:**

1. *The Christadelphian*, 1885, p 125.

# Section 1: Exploring Divine Inspiration

## God Has Spoken

### Atheists

Among the world's population, there are various views about the existence of God. Many people, perhaps the majority of people, do not believe that there is a God. They believe he is just an imagined concept invented to provide hope and comfort in a power bigger than themselves. They believe that God is simply a wish, a hope, an illusion. They do not believe in any god; they worship no divine being. Life for them is what they personally experience with no expectation of plan or purpose beyond the steady, relentless unfolding of random, uncontrolled events. People in this group are called atheists.

### God-Worshippers

In contrast to the position that there is no God or Higher Power, there is a second group of people who believe in a God, or perhaps many gods. The religious perspectives of this group of people range from a simple belief in one God to all sorts of variations. They include belief in two or more gods that are thought to influence various parts of life and the world. With people in most cultures today, and dating back to antiquity, evidence can be found of belief in a god or gods that should be worshipped. Among this group there is no common thread of belief or practice that in any way could be regarded as universal. These groups are disparate and often in serious opposition to each other. For purposes of this article this group will be referred to as god-worshippers.

### Agnostics

There is a third classification of people who fall between the atheists and god-worshippers. People in this group simply declare: "I don't know if there is a god or not. There may be but I cannot find sufficient evidence to prove it with enough certainty for me to believe in god." This group is not critical of atheists for their lack of belief, nor are they disdainful of god-worshippers for their commitment to a god or gods they believe to be real. They simply confess that they do not know for sure if god exists and therefore remain unaligned with any religious system. This group are called agnostics.

### Common features

It is very interesting to look at a common feature of each of these three groups.

Atheists either

- Do not believe in God because they are not aware of any compelling evidence to believe. As they observe life, the world and the universe around them they see no proof of God, no reason to alter their completely independent

mindset and lifestyle to conform to any religious system. They want proof of God's existence.

- Or choose to be so because they do not wish to accept the responsibility this belief entails. Hence, no amount of evidence can change their adherence to atheism.

The god-worshippers approach belief in god through many faith systems. From all over the world, over long periods of time, many religious systems have developed and today have large committed communities of adherents. They are widely disparate in belief and practice. They have no common authoritative information about the god they claim to worship.

The agnostics, by their own admission, do not know what to believe or why they should believe any of the numerous and conflicting claims about God. They are not convinced on matters related to God because they lack an authoritative source, if for them one even exists.

All three groups (except the second type of atheists) need information. They need trustworthy, reliable, verifiable information to support their conclusions about the existence of God, who He is and why He is important to them.

### **What is God's purpose?**

Once the question is settled about the existence of God there remains another major issue. What communication is there from God? What is His purpose in creation and more specifically what is His purpose with humankind? How can a person understand their relationship with an all-powerful God who created the earth?

There is a continuing search for information about God. There is certainly beauty, complexity and design in everything around us which testifies to a higher, purposeful intelligence. But who is this God and what can a person know about Him?

In the vast literature of human history there have been many attempts to describe the creator God, and what He plans to accomplish with the creation. But in all this compendium of literature there is no voice of authority. There is reason and speculation. There are observations and conjecture. Science is co-mingled with philosophy to project views about God, purpose, the meaning of life, and the future of all things. There remains, however, the essential missing ingredient — where is the voice of authority? Where can we learn about the nature of God, the meaning of life, and the future of the world we inhabit?

The book we call the Bible claims to be this authority. It claims to document the actions, the words, the expectations of the creator God. In this respect it is unique among books. To claim to be the inspired Word of God does not make it true. There needs to be sound reasons for believing this claim. The next section of this article will show why we can have complete confidence in the Bible's claim of Divine inspiration. It will cover the claims of the Old Testament and why it can be trusted as a record of God's purposes and His oversight of His creation.

## Reasons for believing the Bible

There are sound fundamental reasons for believing in God and that the Bible is the inspired Word of God. This introductory section deals with only one of these factors — the record of the Old Testament to show evidence of God speaking, hearing and acting. There are at least five additional factors of great significance.

**Historical Accuracy:** The historical accuracy of the Old Testament is the subject of extensive, careful scholarship in universities around the world. Historical records of ancient cultures and nations provide abundant confirmation of interchange with people and events documented in the Old Testament.

**Archaeological Evidence:** Hundreds of archaeological excavations in Israel and throughout the Mediterranean basin have verified the existence of people and places described in the Old Testament. Thousands of artifacts, excavation of ancient cities, examination of ancient buildings, seaports and trade routes all help confirm the accuracy of the Bible record. Examination of thousands of ancient documents and manuscripts provide abundant evidence of the veracity of the Hebrew Scriptures.

**Fulfilled Prophecy:** Fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies related to Israel, Egypt, Phoenicia, Assyria, Babylon, Philistia and other nations in the ancient world have come true with remarkable accuracy. Prophecies related to the families of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, David and Solomon have unfolded exactly as outlined in the Bible record.

**Witness of the people of Israel:** The descendants of Abraham who later became the people of the ancient nation of Israel are the subject of most of the Old Testament record. What God said to them, how He instructed them, how He treated them are all primary themes of the Books of the Old Testament. Within this context are many specific prophecies that predict important events that affected the Nation of Israel. These prophecies were fulfilled with amazing accuracy, thus supporting their Divine source.

**The Bible's accurate assessment of human nature:** Analysis of human nature is a subject of extensive study and observation. Countless books have been written to explain human behavior, to analyze the normal and abnormal behavioral patterns, and attempt to predict future attitudes and conduct. While not seeming to be a psychology book, the Bible is outstanding in its analysis of human behavior and the consequences of the full range of human conduct. Human mortality, with its limitations and potential, are described in surprisingly accurate detail throughout the Bible.

## The Bible's claim of Divine Authority

One of the most important claims in the Old Testament is that the record clearly claims to be God speaking, God hearing and God acting. Here are some examples of statements taken directly from the Bible that claim to be God speaking or acting.

*“Now the LORD said to Abram, Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land which I will shew you;*

*and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great; and so you will shall be a blessing; and I will bless those who bless you, and the one ho curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed” (Gen 12:1-3).*

*“Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Go to Pharaoh and speak to him, “Thus says the LORD, the God of the Hebrews. ‘Let my people go that they may serve me’ ” (Exod 9:1).*

*“The LORD said to Joshua, See, I have given Jericho into your hand, with its king and the valiant warriors” (Josh 6:2).*

*“I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give to each man according to his ways, According to the results of his deeds” (Jer 17:10).*

<b>Bible Text</b>	<b>Occurrences in OT</b>
“Thus saith the Lord”	413 times
“the word of the Lord came unto me saying”	416 times
“and the Lord said”	203 times
“and God said”	30 times
“and the Lord God said”	4 times
“God commanded”	14 times
“God saw”	11 times
“the Lord heard”	10 times

These are unusual statements. They cannot be the words of men. They speak of things far beyond the scope of normal human perception and ability. The Bible is full of such words that claim to be the voice of God speaking. Consider the words or actions directly attributed to God in the Old Testament

The above chart shows that there are over 1000 direct references in the Old Testament that claim to be God’s words or God’s actions. What are we to make of this? If this is a true and accurate documentation of God speaking, responding, or acting then the Bible is a unique record that demands our careful attention. If these claims are not to be trusted the Bible should be regarded as a work of fiction, or even worse, a record of dishonest claims of a fictitious God.

Another fact is clear. It is reasonable to conclude that the Bible stands or falls as a complete document. Either it is a divinely inspired record of God’s actions, His words, interventions and guidance in human affairs or it is fictitious and cannot be trusted. It stands or falls together. We cannot highly regard the 10 Commandments that claim to be given by an all-powerful and all-knowing God, if we do not believe in that God. If God did not give the 10 Commandments to Moses, as is documented in the Book of Exodus, then the record is fraudulent and dishonest.

## Putting it all together

Let's now put the parts of this consideration together. There are those who do not believe in the existence of god — any god at all. There are those who declare that they don't know if a god exists. And there are people who worship god in many diverse ways. Accurate, reliable information is what each of the groups need to confirm their position. There is no single source of information on this matter that is universally trusted. The Bible stands out among world literature as a document that claims to record information about God. Its claims are unique and require us to satisfy our minds about its reliability

The chart to the right identifies factors that validate the truth and reliability of the Bible.

Any one of these witnesses would strongly support belief in God and the Bible. Taken together they provide a comprehensive and reliable bases for belief that the Bible is the inspired Word of God.

This study is not an intellectual exercise. The conclusions we reach on this subject will affect our whole outlook on the meaning and purpose of life. More specifically, our conclusions will affect our personal view of life, and the standards and values we will live

by. Will God be a part of our living? The following quote from John Carter's book *The Oracles of God* provides a valuable challenge to our thinking on these matters.

“The authority of the Bible is in itself, because it is God's word. There is no satisfactory middle ground between full acceptance and complete rejection. If it is God's word its witness concerning itself is of primary importance: that witness we have seen to be consistent and uncompromising. We decide our attitude to it, and so doing determine whether we will accept infallible divine guidance, or set up a standard of our own by which to guide our lives”.

*Ken Curry (Toronto East, ON)*

Further recommended reading on this topic:

- *The Oracles of God* , John Carter (1944) CMPA Birmingham, UK
- *The Bible as History*, Werner Keller (Rev 1983) Bantam Books NY, NY
- *Know Why You Believe*, P. E. Little (1999) Chariot Victor Publishing Colorado, USA
- *20 Compelling Evidences that God Exists*, K. D. Boa & R.M. Bowman Jr. (2005) Cook Comm., Colorado Springs, USA



# How the New Testament Confirms Divine Inspiration

## Citations in New Testament

The New Testament is replete with citations and direct and indirect allusions to the Old Testament. The Blue Letter Bible<sup>1</sup> online has a list of over 900 references. These statistics alone are impressive evidence of the interdependency of the two major sections of the Scriptures. It is clear from the sheer number of connections that the New Testament narrative and teaching is tightly coupled to that of the Old Testament, whether by prophecy, comparison or contrast. Every New Testament writer cites or alludes to the Old Testament. Each one treats the text as divinely inspired for the purposes of either storytelling (for example, the four Gospel writers and Luke with Acts), or for doctrinal exposition (Paul, James, Peter and the writer of Hebrews).

Paul, in particular, was raised as a student of the Law and the Prophets. As a Pharisee, he knew his Bible inside out (Acts 23:6, Phil 3:5). Yet, even though his previous religious convictions put him violently at odds with Christ, after his conversion he wrote with full conviction that *“all scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness”* (2Tim 3:16 ESV). The Scripture he referred to here is what we call the Old Testament. So, post-conversion, Paul continued to accept the divine inspiration of the Old Testament, albeit with a different understanding. The extensively reasoned arguments for faith in Christ we find in Romans are based heavily on Paul’s exposition of Old Testament texts. The implicit assumption he made is that those texts are “God breathed”. For example, Romans 4 cites the promises to Abraham in Gen 15:5,6, Gen 17:5,10 and Psa 32:1,2 to prove that believers in Christ are counted righteous by faith and consequently forgiven. This teaching is in direct contrast to that of the Pharisees who taught that righteousness was attained by works. Yet astonishingly, Paul, rather than renouncing his belief in the inspiration of Scriptures, confirmed it by continuing to refer to Old Testament texts in building his arguments for the truth of the Christian faith.

Peter also relied heavily on Old Testament passages to prove the resurrection of Jesus Christ, in Acts 2 and onwards. In that seminal public speech in Jerusalem, Peter quoted extensively from Joel 2, Psalm 16 and Psalm 110 to prove that God raised Jesus from the dead. He gave a radical interpretation of Old Testament texts that, up until this point, had only been understood as if through a cloudy lens. Peter presented them with a fresh, reasonable and life-saving application. In expounding Psa 16:10 in particular (*“You will not abandon my soul to Hades or let your Holy One see corruption”*), Peter sensibly and logically asserted:

*“Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised up, and of that we are all witnesses”* (Acts 2:29-31).

Peter's newfound courage and, undoubtedly, inspired speech resulted in three thousand converts to Christ that day. The crowning point of his speech, and the one that brings about a conscience-riven reaction from his audience, relied on the most quoted<sup>2</sup> Old Testament passage in the New Testament: "*The Lord<sup>3</sup> said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool*" (Acts 2:34, citing Psa 110:1). Peter's exposition of this is plain: "*Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified*" (Acts 2:26). The prophetic validity and moral force of this Old Testament text are powerful, and because Peter's words fell on the fertile ground of the minds of many present, they were also life-saving. This is divine inspiration in its most creative effect: the new creation of the ecclesia of God is founded upon the truth of the death and resurrection of Jesus, and his exaltation to God's right hand as the Christ. Peter's speech is a practical demonstration of Paul's assertion: "*I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek*" (Rom 1:16).

### **Jesus from a child**

Perhaps even more significant than Paul and Peter's acceptance of the divine inspiration of the Old Testament is Jesus' attitude towards it. From a child he was taught to love the word of God. Luke recounts how, at the young age of twelve, Jesus was so enthralled with learning that he remained with the teachers of the Law, "*sitting among*" them, listening to them (first) and asking them questions (second). Bro. Harry Whittaker and others<sup>4</sup> speculate on the nature of the questions he asked them, as later in his ministry: "*What think ye of Christ? Whose Son is He? If David call Him Lord, how is He then his Son?*" "*Which is the first and great commandment?*" "*Who is my neighbor?*" Whatever his questions were, the teachers clearly asked Jesus questions in return, for "*all who heard him were amazed at his understanding, and his answers*" (Luke 2:47). Already, Jesus was confident and familiar enough with the text to engage in adult discussions regarding its meaning.

### **The Old Testament**

As he matured to full manhood we see Jesus use the OT Scriptures in a number of ways. Here are some examples:

- As a bulwark against temptation — Matthew 4.
- For comfort and reassurance (in conjunction with prayer) — Matt 27:46, John 19:28.
- Prophetically — Matt 11:7-11; 21:42; most of ch 24; 26:54-56.
- Exposition about his person and work — Matt 12:1-8; 12:38-42; 13:13-16; 21:15-16; 22:42-45, Luke 4:16-22; 24:27, 45, John 3:14-16; 5:39; 6:35-59; 7:38; 15:25; 17:12.
- Moral and practical teaching — Matt 5:21-48; 18:15-20; 19:3-9, Luke 18:18-22.
- First principles teaching — Matt 5:2-12; 22:35-40, Mark 18-27; 12:28-34, Luke 4:25-30.

Early in Jesus' ministry, shortly after he returned from the wilderness experience "in the power of the Spirit," (Luke 4:14) he entered the synagogue at Nazareth. He stood up to read from the scroll of Isaiah at chapter 61:1. Halfway through verse two he sat down. All eyes were then fixed on him. He did not complete the reading. In addition, he interjected a portion of Isa 58:6: "to set at liberty those who are oppressed" (Luke 4:18). At this point, Jesus expounded the text, starting with "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (vs 21). From there he continued to preach directly to them from the OT text. In subsequent verses we read of Jesus making several references to 1st Kings, to prove that the gentiles are included in God's plan of salvation. Here Jesus clearly demonstrated his belief that the OT text is inspired and he uses it as the authoritative basis of his teachings.

## **Divorce and Jesus**

The discussion over the applicability of divorce in Matthew 19 is a particularly powerful example for demonstrating Jesus' belief in the inerrant inspiration of the OT Scriptures. The Pharisees challenged him on this topic in an attempt to embroil him in controversy, knowing that this was a question that was cause for division amongst themselves. They hoped that Jesus's response would inflame that division. The school of Shammai held a conservative view while the school of Hillel understood the phrase 'matter of shame' from Deut 24:1 in the "widest possible sense, and declared it sufficient ground for divorce if a woman had spoiled her husband's dinner"<sup>5</sup>.

Jesus answered them using an approach that was foreign to their own debating style. They were used to quoting different rabbinical writings or sayings in defense of their positions, rather than appealing to the original text. In contrast, Jesus cited Gen 1:27 and Gen 2:18 : "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife and the two shall become one flesh?' So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together let not man separate" (Matt 19:4-6). By quoting directly from Scripture Jesus both elevated the discussion and removed himself from the foolish debate of the Pharisees. His response was based on the divine authority of Genesis rather than the opinions of rabbis, and corresponded to neither school of thought. He taught them that the God's teaching on the subject was much more conservative than any of their own. Rather than divorce being a right or privilege, it is an expediency: "Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so" (Matt 19:8). Again, Jesus expounded the original text. In this case he drew a contrast between Moses' provision in Deut 24:1-4 and God's original intent in Genesis 1 and 2. His use of the phrase "from the beginning" draws our attention back to Genesis 1. Throughout the discussion Jesus relied on the OT text alone for his reasoning and treated it as authoritative and divinely inspired.

## **Jesus teaches from the Old Testament**

In another encounter with the Pharisees Jesus asked them a question. His intention was not to 'test' them, as they did him, but rather to teach them about who he is: "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" When they replied "The

son of David” he asked a follow-up question in which he explicitly expressed his acceptance of the OT Scriptures as being divinely inspired: “How is then that David, **in the Spirit**, calls him Lord, saying ‘The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet?’” [my emphasis] (Matt 22:41-45). Here Jesus told them, as on previous occasions, that he is the Son of God. But rather than just asserting that fact with no witness he used the witness of God’s word to prove it. And he applied an interpretation that previously had escaped their understanding: the reference to ‘my Lord’ by David can only mean one thing — that, even though Jesus was descended from David by birth, prophetically David regarded him as his Lord and Master. The silent response of Jesus’ audience in verse 46 speaks volumes. Jesus’ application of the text was unassailable. He had proven his sonship by relying on those texts he had learnt as a child and held dear to his heart for all those years. He unquestioningly accepted the fact of both the continued relevance and the inspiration of the OT text.

Although all New Testament writers reference the OT text in one way or another, what better witness to the veracity, reliability and relevance of the Old Testament and the New Testament’s inextricable dependency on it can we have than the evidence of Jesus’ own trust in its divine inspiration? If Jesus believed it, we can too.

*Duncan Kenzie (Saanich Peninsula, BC)*

#### Notes:

1. [www.blueletterbible.org/study/misc/quotes.cfm](http://www.blueletterbible.org/study/misc/quotes.cfm).
2. See Matt 22:44, Mark 12:36, Luke 20:42, John 12:34, Acts 2:34, 1Cor 15:25, Heb 1:13, Heb 5:6, Heb 7:17, 21, Heb 10:12,13, Rev 3:21, Rev 6:15.
3. Both occurrences of “Lord” use the same Greek word, *kurios*.
4. Jamieson, Fausset and Brown at [www.blueletterbible.org](http://www.blueletterbible.org) and *Studies in the Gospels*, Third Impression, Harry Whittaker, page 42.
5. Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus The Messiah*, Book 3, page 335, MacDonald Publishing Company, McLean, Virginia.

## Partial Inspiration Controversy and Its Lessons for Today

### Introduction

In this article, we will mainly focus on the effects of the dispute on our community’s view on inspiration, and not on the somewhat messy details of the division itself. The events we describe took place starting in 1885, but their ramifications and effects lasted until the resultant split was healed in 1956. The agreement at that time included a statement on the inspiration of the Scriptures, although this had not been a matter of dispute for some time. (The other topics, including marriage, resurrectional responsibility, and treatment of error, all were then of more concern.) This statement was:

“We agree that the Holy Scriptures, consisting of the Old and New Testaments, are the only authoritative source of knowledge concerning God and His Purpose. They are wholly given by the inspiration of God and are consequently without error except such as may be due to transcription or translation”<sup>1</sup>

This can be compared with the foundation clause of the BASF, which says:

“That the book currently known as the Bible, consisting of the Scriptures of Moses, the prophets, and the apostles, is the only source of knowledge concerning God and His purposes at present extant or available in the earth, and that the same were wholly given by inspiration of God in the writers, and are consequently without error in all parts of them, except such as may be due to errors of transcription or translation”.

It should be noted that this statement of 1956 actually corrects the flaw in the “Foundation Clause”, which, although all accept that Roberts was referring to the whole Bible, states “the Scriptures of Moses, the prophets, and the apostles” which seemingly excludes several books, including the historical books and the Psalms among others!

### **Robert Ashcroft, the main protagonist**

The dispute had its origin in the early 1880's. Robert Ashcroft, a converted Congregationalist minister, was becoming increasingly popular as a lecturer. Robert Roberts, showing considerable personal generosity, appealed for aid to maintain Ashcroft in the position of sub-editor of the *Christadelphian* magazine. This proposal was accepted, and the American brethren came forward at this time with offers for Ashcroft to conduct a lecture tour among them, which was undertaken in the latter part of 1882. However, Ashcroft never settled to the work of assisting in publishing, and towards the close of 1884 Ashcroft proposed to begin another magazine, although Roberts did not consider the time opportune. He had no official position from which to prevent the development of other publications, nor even to appeal for a boycott. As long as Ashcroft remained un-heretical Roberts had no legitimate cause to quarrel. *The Christadelphian* was not an official organ, could dictate neither doctrine nor procedure — at least in theory, and could not even regard a new magazine as a rival.

So Ashcroft started his magazines, *The Biblical Exegetist*.

### **The article in the Exegetist**

It seems appropriate to quote from the *Exegetist* itself, rather than quote from those describing its content. The article is entitled “Theories of Inspiration”, and we only have space to use one extract.

“We apply a much more reasonable canon of interpretation to the sacred writings when we so far overcome our timidity as to acknowledge in them the presence of a human as well as a divine element. It may be presumed that the Providence of God has superintended the conveyancing of the



Scriptures from the date of their production to the present time; and, although this divine surveillance has ensured the infallibility of every text and word, it has yet been ample for all the ends contemplated thereby. Those ends are of a moral and spiritual character, and are abundantly served by the Scriptures as we now have them, notwithstanding all alleged inaccuracies and contradictions. It is not intended that we test the soundness of every bolt and link in the chain which supports the bridge we may wish to cross; there may be a hundred flaws in these portions of the architecture, but the structure itself is, notwithstanding, strong enough to bear the weight of a whole population.”

Roberts summarized the view of Ashcroft as:

- That only parts of the Old Testament Scriptures are inspired, viz., such parts as could not otherwise be produced.
- That the Bible is not to be spoken of as the word of God, without qualification.
- That there is in it a human (i.e., an erring) as well as a divine element.
- That historical infallibility is not to be conceded to everything recorded in the Bible.
- That inspiration only covers “all that may be said to belong to divine revelation proper: by which is to be understood everything in the Scriptures that may have been beyond the power of man to discover for himself.”
- That subordinate features “may have been introduced into the Bible,” with which inspiration has nothing to do, and that such things form “legitimate topics of critical enquiry.”
- That inspiration does not teach that which is otherwise ascertainable.
- That, except where Christ expressly ascribes a divine authority to particular predictions, we are not to regard his allusion to particular books of the Bible as proving the inspiration and authority of those books: such allusions being merely proof of the notoriety of the books at the time and of their reception by the Jews.
- That it is unreasonable to suppose “that the attestation which Christ and the apostles gave to the divine mission of Moses and the prophets extends to every point and portion of the Jewish history,” or proves the circumstantial truth of every narrative of the Old Testament.
- That the apostles did not regard the very words of all the Hebrew Scriptures as the product of inspiration.

The fundamental point of the article is to regard only some parts of the Bible as inspired and infallible: and which other parts are regarded as products entirely of man, and not God, is essentially left to human discretion. Hence the term “partial inspiration”.

### **The result of the article**

So the suggestion was that inspiration attached only to those parts of the Bible which contained things which a man could not discover for himself. Ashcroft thereby recognized a human element in Scripture, which he asserted was not

historically infallible. To this departure from accepted understanding, Ashcroft later added a somewhat scornful onslaught on the work of John Thomas, and a eulogy of clerical scholarship.

Roberts' retort was immediate and unequivocal in defense of the complete divinity and infallibility of all Scripture. Within a few days he wrote and issued a pamphlet under the title of 'The Inspiration of the Bible.' In spite of this defense, the intemperateness of tone which Roberts displayed displeased some brethren, the dispute extended, and the community spiraled into a division. Roberts accused Ashcroft of 'pernicious and disloyal trimming to meet the requirements of modern criticism.' 'God had left the Bible as an institution for the taking out of a people for his name, and it must not be tampered with.' 'Brother Ashcroft has taken to popularizing the truth among the genteel and "learned" . . . he ought to know that very few learned men and women ever embraced the faith of the "poor and needy man"; . . . has brother Ashcroft forgot, or did he ever know, that it's the poor and simple-minded (and therefore unlearned) that God has chosen in every age in the working out of his plans?'

Nonetheless the theory of partial inspiration met with some success from the start. Ashcroft had, after Roberts, 'more moral weight in the ecclesias than any living brother.' Every ecclesia had to go into the matter and state its position, with Roberts urging all to take their stand on the Bible. But some chose to regard Roberts' view as only a theory, on which loyalty did not depend. Once divided, every attempt to reconcile the contending parties merely resulted in widening the gulf, creating new and varying positions of schism. There were heretics, those who would fellowship heretics, those who would not emphatically 'disfellowship' heretics, and those who sought to pass resolutions which permitted heretical views on inspiration to find accommodation in ecclesias predominantly orthodox. In North America there was less willingness to divide over the matter, although a few ecclesias did support those who separated from Bro. Roberts, as was reported in the *Fraternal Visitor*<sup>1</sup> magazine.

## Consequences

There was a tremendous outpouring of articles and pamphlets over the next few years, and indeed the pages of the *Fraternal Visitor* remained concerned with the dispute, at least partially reflecting the views of Ashcroft, for many years. We might in addition mention a long "letter"<sup>2</sup> from JJ Andrew<sup>3</sup>, in which he defends Roberts at great length: over 60,000 words. He expounds on these propositions (slightly modified):

- That Divine Inspiration involves infallibility in what is spoken or written under its influence — so controlling the speaker or writer as to exclude error.
- That the recording under Divine Inspiration of uninspired utterances, does not, unless otherwise indicated, do more than guarantee an accurate record of what was uttered.
- That the incorporation, under Divine Inspiration, of human with inspired writings (if such incorporation has taken place) would constitute them of equal authority.

- That the existing evidence of the divine authority of the writings comprising the Bible, and the absence of any to the contrary, justifies the conclusion that they have been produced or incorporated under divine inspiration.
- That any errors found in the Bible as we now have it are not attributable to the original writers, but are either mistakes on the part of copyists or translators, or designed alterations, omissions or interpolations. It is noticeable that all such errors are unimportant, and do not impair its reliability or the truth and consistency of its message.
- That, in view of the length of time which has elapsed since the production of the autographs, and the extent to which difficulties in existing copies have been removed, through modern discovery and research, we are justified in attributing any other errors to insufficient information.
- That the fundamental principle involved in the foregoing propositions, viz. — the divine authorship and consequent infallibility of the Bible — is an essential element in our basis of fellowship, and therefore we decline to fellowship those who attribute to some parts a fallible authorship.

I would consider these propositions cover both the essence of our belief in the Inspiration of Scriptures and what it entails, and the result of denying these propositions in whole or in part.

*Peter Hemingray (Detroit Royal Oak, MI)*

Notes:

1. *The Fraternal Visitor* became the magazine of those who split from Roberts. First published in 1885, it ceased publication in 1957 in order to cement the re-union of the “Fraternal Visitor” Fellowship with the “Central” Fellowship.
2. *The Christadelphian*, 1885 p 545–563 (first part).
3. JJ Andrew a few years later came up with a new theory as to who was resurrected to Judgment, but at the time (1885 – 1886) was a staunch supporter of Roberts in this controversy.

## ***The Healing of the Inspiration Division, 1957***

*The Reunion Committees have laboured earnestly and prayerfully to remove all reasonable doubts and misgivings put forward by ecclesias and individuals; and they feel that the assurances and explanations which have been given by interview and correspondence are such as should enable all brethren and sisters to co-operate fully in promoting the unity of the Body in love and harmony.*

*We believe the move to re-unite to be based upon sound principles, mutually understood and accepted. Brethren and sisters will realise, none the less, that such a move, to be entirely successful, requires an act of faith and mutual trust on the part of all. Goodwill, patience, and faithful adherence to the principles defined in the Final Statement, we believe, will bring effective and harmonious co-operation.*

*We pray for the divine guidance and blessing in this reunion, so that the division which has so long separated us may give place to fruitful unity and endeavour, to the glory of God and in the preparation of a people prepared for the Lord at is coming.*

## Section 2: Why I Can Believe the Bible

### An Audacious Claim

Bible Believer: Hi, are you interested in the Bible and God?

Interested But Skeptical: Yes, well, I'm interested but also somewhat skeptical.

BB: Hence, the name.

IBS: Mm, so, what's your best proof there's a God then?

BB: Israel.

IBS: That's a country, not a reason.

BB: King Fredrick the Great of Prussia asked a similar thing in 1779.

IBS: He's in good company, then. So, what was the response?

BB: He asked for an irrefutable proof of God and was told, "The Jews"<sup>1</sup>

IBS: That's a race, not a reason.

BB: Well the Jews and Israel are proof that God exists and his Bible tells the future.

IBS: An audacious claim, indeed!

BB: The Bible prophesied the Jews would be scattered then re-gathered, including these words from Isaiah:

*"And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea. And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth" (Isa 11:11-12).*

*"Fear not: for I am with thee: I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west; I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back: bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth;" (Isa 43:5-6).*

IBS: When was that written? What if it was written after the event just to make it look like God knew it would happen?

BB: Isa 1:1 says it was written at the time of Hezekiah, so about 700 BC. Among the Dead Sea scrolls was the book of Isaiah, which has been dated to the 1st Century BC. Also, the Masoretic text of the Bible is dated to the 10th Century AD, so the prophecy was undeniably given over two thousand years ago.

IBS: How do you know it wasn't talking about an earlier Jewish re-gathering?

BB: The interesting thing about the Isaiah 11 prophecy is its reference to a “second time” of gathering. The Jews were re-gathered to Israel a first time in the mid-6th Century BC, but only from Babylon/Persia. This prophecy speaks of “the islands of the sea... and the four corners of the earth”.

IBS: Are those the only prophecies?

BB: No, there are plenty of them. Here are some others:

Deuteronomy speaks of the scattering and persecution of the Jews

*“ye shall be plucked from off the land whither thou goest to possess it. And the LORD shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other; and there thou shalt serve other gods, which neither thou nor thy fathers have known, even wood and stone. And among these nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest: but the LORD shall give thee there a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind.” (Deut 28:63-65).*

*“And I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all countries whither I have driven them, and will bring them again to their folds; and they shall be fruitful and increase” (Jer 23:3).*

*“... the heathen shall know that I am the LORD, saith the Lord GOD, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes. For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land. And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God” (Ezek 36:23,24,28).*

IBS: Enough already!

BB: One more, my favourite one is from Jeremiah 23 where God declares that he would be known as the God who brought Israel back to the land, something that has recently occurred.

*“the days come, saith the LORD, that they shall no more say, The LORD liveth, which brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; But, The LORD liveth, which brought up and which led the seed of the house of Israel out of the north country, and from all countries whither I had driven them; and they shall dwell in their own land” (Jer 23:7,8).*

IBS: When were those written?

BB: Jer 1:2-3 says it was written at the time of the last kings of Judah, around 600BC. Parts of Ezekiel and Jeremiah were found in the Dead Sea Scrolls, copied in the 1st Century BC, and remnants of Ezekiel were discovered in Masada dated 1st Century AD, and both are in the Masoretic Text of the 10th Century.

IBS: But you can read back into things and project your own viewpoint on past events!

BB: True, but plenty of Bible believers understood this well before it happened and at a time when it appeared impossible.

IBS: Such as?

BB: Some 19th Century Authors:

“There is then a partial and primary restoration of Jews before the manifestation ... and the Jewish colonists will return in unbelief of the Messiahship of Jesus.”  
John Thomas, *Elpis Israel*, 1849 14th Ed. p.441

“ ‘The great tribulation’ is yet future. It pre-supposes the Jewish nation restored to Palestine in unbelief to serve Gentile political ends, and brought there by the active intervention of a great maritime power” (*Exposition of the Revelation of Jesus Christ*, Walter Scott 1796-1861)

IBS: So, I agree that the Bible and these prophecies were definitely written thousands of years ago and that Bible students understood them to refer to Israel, but when did Israel become a nation?

BB: On May 14, 1948 an unpretentious man read a declaration of independence. It is easy enough to find footage of it. How many times can you watch a film clip of Bible prophecy being fulfilled?

IBS: Wow, that is pretty impressive.

BB: How else it could be explained? It’s not like we’re inundated with examples of nations that maintained their identity while dispersed throughout the world and then returned to their homeland after two millennia.

IBS: I suppose it could be a lucky guess.

BB: I admire your faith.

IBS: My faith?

BB: Yes, you cannot empirically prove God’s existence one way or another, but these prophecies are genuine evidence. You would have to have great faith to believe it was an extraordinary coincidence and a fantastic guess.

IBS: I see your point, but there are some lifestyle consequences...

BB: Ah, your skepticism may have had an added motivation?

*Joseph Palmer (San Diego, CA)*

“Massacred by thousands, yet springing up again from their undying stock, the Jews appear at all times and in all regions. Their perpetuity, their national immortality, is at once the most curious problem to the political inquirer; to the religious man a subject of profound and awful admiration.”

(Milman, *History of the Jews*, Part II, pp.398-399)

Notes:

1. Variously attributed to his doctor Zimmerman and chamberlain, Marquis D’Argens.

## The Fate of other Nations

Let us set the fate of God's People, Israel, in contrast to the fate of her enemies.

Those who curse Israel will be cursed, those who bless her will be blessed.	Gen 12:3
God would make a full end of the oppressors of Israel, but not Israel.	Jer 30:11
Babylon specifically would be overthrown and destroyed, never to be inhabited again.	Isa 13:19-21; Jer 51:26
Egypt would become a base nation, never to rise up again to its former splendor, never to be ruled by one of its own.	Ezek 29:8-16; 30:13
Tyre would be utterly destroyed, scraped clean as a rock, and made a place for the casting of nets, never to be built again.	Ezek 26:3-14

The record of human history records how unerringly the Divine principle concerning cursing and blessing holds true. From the Egyptians to the Assyrians to the Babylonians down to our day, nations that blessed Israel were blessed, nations who turned against God's People were cursed. Amos 1 is a historical example. Britain, in the twentieth century, from the Balfour Declaration favoring the Jews' colonization of Palestine to the infamous White Papers, provides another striking example of both blessing and cursing. The United States treads the same dangerous ground today.

As to Babylon, Egypt, and Tyre, each in its turn fell to the Divinely directed events that fulfilled their prophetic destiny: Babylon was overthrown, eventually drying up and disappearing into the mists of history, a haunt for the wild animals of the desert. Mighty Egypt lost her grandeur as well as her power, then succumbed to permanent foreign domination, while her people degenerated into a base and ignoble race to this day. And Tyre, destroyed first by Nebuchadnezzar, was ultimately, literally, scraped bare by Alexander's army in order to provide material for a causeway out to the island fortress of a second Tyre. Any encyclopedia or history book can provide fuller details. Everything happened as God said. ("Evidence That Demands a Verdict", by Josh McDowell, provides a good compendium of quotes from historical sources to document the fulfillment of these prophecies).

**Now consider:** The first point made in the grid above is ever in danger of being falsified: Just find one example where this has not proved true and the certainty of God's Word is forever lost.

Could the diverse histories of those who oppressed or made merchandise of God's People be just shrewd guesses based on the knowledge of history and the political movements of the times? Why didn't they get Egypt or Babylon or Tyre mixed up? How could the prophets know the history of these people in such exacting detail?

Most remarkably, these prophecies could be disproved at any moment in history. Egyptians could regain their national birthright and glory; the great city of Babylon

could be raised up from its ruins (as Saddam Hussein attempted in recent years); and someone could rebuild the prosperous city Tyre on its ancient foundations. But none of these things have happened...yet; and those who believe the Bible would suggest that they never will. God's word has and ever will stand firm.

*Ted Sleeper (San Francisco Peninsula, CA)*

## The Mystery of Daniel 2

Babylon is a name that emerged into common parlance during the Gulf War. Sadaam fancied himself to be a modern King Nebuchadnezzar, the ancient king who rebuilt Babylon into one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. If Sadaam knew his history, he might have been a little less arrogant, for it was such boasting that got Nebuchadnezzar into serious trouble in his day! (Daniel 4).

### Nebuchadnezzar's Image

Nebuchadnezzar is first known in the Bible as the king who subjugated the nation of Israel, then as the king who had an impressive dream. He dreamed of a mighty image of man, made of different metals and awesome in appearance. As he watched in his dream, a stone, cut out of a mountain by some unknown means, came hurtling towards the feet of this mighty image and struck it on its feet. As Nebuchadnezzar watched in utter amazement, this stone broke the whole statue in pieces, and ground it to a powder carried away by the wind, leaving this stone to become a great mountain which filled the whole earth.

Nebuchadnezzar was overwhelmed. He searched everywhere for someone to make known to him the interpretation. At last, a young Jewish prophet named Daniel was brought to him. The king said to Daniel, whose Babylonian name was Belteshazzar, “ *Are you able to make known to me the dream that I have seen and its interpretation?*” Daniel answered the king, *‘No wise men, enchanters, magicians, or astrologers can show to the king the mystery which the king has asked, but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days. Your dream and the visions of your head as you lay in bed are these...’*” (Daniel 2:26-29).

Daniel proceeded to outline for the king a prophecy of staggering scope.

You, O king...are the head of gold.	<b>Babylon</b> (vs. 37-38)
After you shall arise another kingdom (of silver) inferior to you...	<b>Medo-Persia</b> (v.39; cf. ch.8:20-22)
and yet a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth.	<b>Greece</b> (before & after Alexander the Great) (vs. 39; cf. ch.11:1-4)
And there shall be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron, because iron breaks to pieces and shatters all things; and like iron which crushes, it shall break and crush all these.	<b>Rome</b> (vs. 40)

<p>And as you saw the feet and toes partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, it shall be a divided kingdom; ... (also) the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly brittle... they will mix with one another in marriage, but they will not hold together, just as iron does not mix with clay.</p>	<p>Fifth (&amp; final) Desolating Power (vs. 41-43)</p>
<p>And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed, nor shall its sovereignty be left to another people. It (the stone) shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand for ever;</p>	<p><b>God's King</b> who destroys all enemies, establishing God's kingdom on earth in their stead. (vs. 44)</p>



All of these “world” empires can only claim one thing in common: They all dominated and oppressed the Land and the People of Israel. But why is there only four? Because it is plain history that Rome was the last power to have dominion and control over both the land and people. (Others, such as the Arabs and later the Turks controlled the land at various times, but not the Jewish people.)

**How could this possibly be?**

Because Rome in 70 AD completely blotted out Israel's national existence and dispersed the Jews to the four winds of heaven. From AD 70 to AD 1948, when Israel became a viable nation in its own land, no other power has been capable of either fulfilling or disproving this prophecy.

When Israel re-emerged in 1948 as a people and nation in their own land, the stage was set for the final act of this prophecy: The emergence and destruction of a fifth and final power to dominate the nation and people of Israel. This power will apparently be a confederacy of nations raised up from the still-remaining remnants of the old, authoritarian Roman Empire co-mingled with others.

**Now consider:**

How did Daniel know there would be only four super-power oppressors of Israel and a fifth, final manifestation involving elements of the fourth? Daniel makes no mention of a delay, yet almost 2000 years intervenes between the 4th and 5th power. How did he know the 4th of these (the Romans) would so decisively scatter the Jews that the possibility of another desolator could not arise between the 4th and 5th desolator?

And consider this: This prophecy ever stands ready to be disproved in our day and age. If the next oppressor, arising from the fragments of the old Roman Empire, does not bring about the final work of God with His People and presage their final deliverance, then not only the Bible, but all who put their trust in this book as the only revelation of the God of Heaven, will forever be discredited.

*Ted Sleeper (San Francisco Peninsula, CA)*

## A Challenge from God

Not quite two thousand years ago an extraordinary event occurred, an event that ultimately changed the course of human history to this day. The incident itself was not particularly noteworthy. I'm certain this was not the first time in human affairs that such a thing had occurred. What made it significant was the individual who was involved. What am I talking about? I'm talking about a tomb that was found empty.

Why should you or I care about this particular tomb? Because the man it once held was subsequently claimed by his followers to have been brought back from the dead by God, never to die again. This same man was both the Lord and Christ to whom we must submit as God's appointed King. (See Acts 2:32-36). Wow. That is another audacious claim...*if it is true.*

This is where the Divine challenge is found: In that small word "if". But how can we determine whether this story is really true, rather than just a myth perpetuated by the disillusioned disciples of Jesus? If it is just a myth, then even an atheist would agree "*if in this life only we have hope in Christ [who has not be raised from the dead -v.17], we are of all men most pitiable*" (1Cor 15:19).

### Center of conflict

There have been some who have argued from time to time that Jesus never died, but somehow managed to escape from the tomb. No serious historian believes this because there is sufficient evidence of Jesus' existence and crucifixion by the Romans. There is only one question that has ever been seriously argued: *How did the tomb become empty?* This is the central question we must be able to answer for our young people and our friends and neighbors.

### Abductive Inference

There is a scientific tool used by those seeking to examine an historical event, it is called "abductive inference". This is not quite the same as the deductive or inductive reasoning used in most research. Abductive inferences are like this:

- Major Premise: If a mudslide occurred, we would expect to find felled trees.
- Minor Premise: We find evidence of felled trees.
- Conclusion: Therefore, we have reason to think that a mudslide may have occurred.

To move a conclusion from "may have" to "certainly did", one must evaluate all competing hypotheses to eliminate all but the most likely cause, or, demonstrate there is only *one* known cause for the event.

### Generally accepted evidence

Let's review the evidence generally accepted by historians before examining the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus.

## **Messianic Expectations of Jewish People**

The Jews in the first century were fervently expecting the fulfillment of OT messianic prophecies (e.g. Dan. 9).

## **Jesus Was a Real, Historical Person, Crucified by the Romans Around 30 AD**

Wikipedia provides a succinct affirmation of this evidence: “Most modern scholars of antiquity agree that Jesus existed, but scholars differ on the historicity of specific episodes described in the Biblical accounts... (there is) almost universal assent that Jesus... was crucified by the order of the Roman Prefect Pontius Pilate.” ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity\\_of\\_Jesus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Jesus))

## **Roman Crucifixion Ensured Jesus Really Died**

Crucifixion was a Roman form of punishment, carried out according to Roman law. It involved severe scourging prior to execution. *Those entrusted with this responsibility did so knowing their own lives would be forfeit if they failed to complete the execution.*

## **Burial According to Jewish Custom**

Jesus' body was taken from the execution site, anointed with costly spices, and *tightly wound from head to foot with linen*, all in accord with acknowledged Jewish custom.

## **Tomb Was Sealed**

Jesus was buried in a rock-hewn tomb sealed by Jewish leaders to ensure no one would tamper with it (Matt 27:66). *Sealing of a tomb was an official and legal Roman practice; disruption of seals carried a penalty under Roman law.*

## **Tomb Guarded By Soldiers**

Jewish leaders also put a guard in place to doubly secure the tomb. If these were Roman soldiers, their lives were at stake. If this was the Jewish temple guard, they would be even more diligent for racial and religious reasons, besides the discipline to which they were subject.

## **Tomb Was Empty**

Three days later this same tomb was found empty. This one fact has never been seriously disputed, not even by the chief antagonists to Christian claims, the Jews. The dispute has always centered on *how* the tomb became empty.

## **Transformation of Disciples: Fearful to Fearless**

Jesus' disciples by their own accounts did not expect his death. Again, by their own accounts, they were completely disillusioned and demoralized when it happened. These disciples had to be convinced by both physical and Scriptural evidence that Jesus truly rose from dead. Fifty days later these same disciples began to preach the resurrection of Jesus with a strength and boldness that astonished their enemies. Almost all the Apostles (as well as some other disciples, e.g. Stephen) died violently for the conviction they had not only seen Jesus alive from the dead, but also

talked to, ate with, handled, and watched him ascend. Others suffered life-long humiliation, deprivation, and loss of property and social status.

### **Conversion of Skeptical Witnesses**

Paul, trained in the strictest sect of the Jewish religion, went from vigorous enemy to the most powerful defender of Christianity. He suffered many things for his new convictions about the risen Jesus. James, the half-brother of Jesus, was a strong skeptic throughout Jesus' ministry (John 7:5). Even the care of Jesus' mother was not committed to James. Yet, soon after Jesus ascended, James was counted among the believers, and became a leader in the Jerusalem ecclesia.

### **Moral Imperative of Christianity**

The teaching of both Jesus and his Apostles called men to a highly moral life: honesty and integrity were fundamental virtues of this life. Lying, deceit, hypocrisy, and all forms of immorality were grounds for exclusion from the early Christian community. The virtuous and highly moral conduct of early Christians was well known even to their enemies. (Matt 15:18-20; 1Pet 3:9-12; Eph 4:22-25; Gal 6:7-10; Letter of Pliny the Younger to Trajan, Epistle X.96; Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, Edward Gibbon, Ch.15, p.182 and others.)

### **Principle of Embarrassment**

Would writers of history invent details that do not help their cause? While one might not expect the first eyewitness of a risen Jesus to be important dignitary like Caiaphas, Pilate, or King Herod, one would expect a disciple like Peter or John to be there. Instead, we find it was a *woman of questionable background*, Mary Magdalene, who first encountered Jesus. Why would the Gospel writers claim *this* Mary was first eyewitness? Either the writers were foolish, exceedingly clever, or they wrote precisely what happened.

### **Nazareth Inscription**

The Nazareth Inscription is a marble tablet (24 by 15 inches) providing the earliest known written record that many scholars believe references the events concerning Jesus' empty tomb. The Nazareth Inscription is almost certainly authentic and is a summary of an imperial edict issued by the Emperor Claudius in 41 AD.

The early date strongly suggests that this was written with the events surrounding Jesus' empty tomb in mind. The details of the decree do indeed appear to fit Jewish burial practices as opposed to Roman or gentile practices: the reference to sepulcher stones in the edict is in line with Jewish burial practice of the first century A.D. and not with gentile burial practice of this period. Roman burial was generally in dug graves or cremation and not by entombment as implied in the decree. The Romans used coffins in which bodies or urns were buried in individual graves in cemeteries, while Jewish burial, as we know from the New Testament and surviving remains, was in tombs or sepulchers (see John 19:38-42).

## EDICT OF CAESAR

It is my decision [concerning] graves and tombs — whoever has made them for the religious observances of parents, or children, or household members — that these remain undisturbed forever. But if anyone legally charges that another person has destroyed, or has in any manner extracted those who have been buried, or has moved with wicked intent those who have been buried to other places, committing a crime against them, or has moved sepulcher-sealing stones, against such a person, I order that a judicial tribunal be created, just as [is done] concerning the gods in human religious observances, even more so will it be obligatory to treat with honor those who have been entombed. You are absolutely not to allow anyone to move [those who have been entombed]. But if [someone does], I wish that [violator] to suffer capital punishment under the title of tomb-breaker.

It would appear the issue of Jesus' empty tomb eventually came before Caesar as he accepted the Jewish religious leaders' explanation of what happened at the tomb and how Jesus' body came to be missing. Given the Roman respect for the dead, it would appear that Caesar wanted to make sure the same event did not happen again. This is probably why he issued the edict and had the Nazareth stone created.

### **Attempted explanations for the empty tomb**

Let us now look at the explanations that have been put forward to explain the empty tomb. Remember that in abductive reasoning to establish that only *one* explanation is possible, you must *eliminate* all other attempted explanations. In this case, only four basic explanations have been offered to explain the empty tomb over the past 1900 years. We will examine them to see how they hold up given the accepted evidence above.

### **Disciples Stole Body While Guards Slept**

This is the best explanation contemporary enemies of Christians could provide for the empty tomb, which they had personally sealed and set a guard nearby to prevent any tampering with the tomb. But does this really explain the accepted facts? Consider:

- And why were they not severely punished by the Jewish or Roman authorities for failing in their duty?
- Tomb was sealed and zealously guarded by men who were charged to prevent the very thing they now said happened.
- If they “slept”, how did they know it was Jesus' disciples who stole the body?

Most damaging of all: This deception runs completely counter to all that is acknowledged about early disciples and their teaching. Why didn't one of the inner circle expose this sham, especially since most paid for their “deception” with their own blood?

Finally, this explanation completely fails to adequately account for the explosive growth and spread of Christianity in the face of Jewish and Gentile hostility. The facts concerning Jesus could be *personally verified* by many early Jewish converts.

Even more significantly, the conviction that the Jewish Messiah died and was raised on the third day was used to convert the Jews by appeal to Old Testament prophecies about these very things!

### **Recovery in The Tomb**

It has been suggested that Jesus only appeared to die on the cross and later revived either naturally in the coolness of tomb or with help of drugs administered by those in on the “plot”. He later presented himself as having risen from the dead (or allowed his disciples to assume this), then quietly disappeared from the scene. This explanation fails to account for a number of accepted details:

- Roman soldiers were professionals in the business of death. Scourging prior to crucifixion was designed to expedite death. The spear thrust bringing forth blood and water is medically consistent with death. When asked by Pilate whether Jesus was dead, the soldiers literally staked their own lives on their answer.
- The method of Jewish burial argues against recovery. Tightly wrapped linen filled with ointment that secured limbs and blanketed the face would have ensured the death of a victim, rather than promoting a recovery.

This theory fails to account for the sealed tomb, the tomb guard, and Jesus’ physical condition. Does it really seem possible that Jesus unwrapped his tightly bound body, did the impossible by rolling back a sealed stone from the inside, terrified a large contingent of soldiers, walked several miles on severely wounded feet, and, presenting himself to his disciples, overcame their skepticism, then convinced them that the battered and bruised man before them was their risen and immortalized Lord? Does having an accomplice in this matter really make this more plausible?

This theory meets an insurmountable barrier when the character and teaching of Jesus is taken into consideration. A plot to deceive regarding the very foundation of Christianity is completely out of character for either Jesus or his disciples. Jesus’ teaching constantly inculcated the highest regard for integrity and truth, and constantly exposed human nature with its propensity for deception. The honesty and integrity of early Christians was well known even by their enemies.

### **Mass Hallucinations or Visions**

It has been suggested that the shock and grief of Jesus’ death resulted in a kind of religious hysteria or mass hallucination in which the disciples thought they saw their risen Lord. Based on this experience they went on to hazard their lives by proclaiming the resurrection to the world. This theory also fails to account for a number of critical details:

The disciples by their own admission were demoralized and disillusioned by Jesus’ unexpected death and had to be convinced of the resurrection by hard physical evidence. Unlike the normal grief process wherein one thinks they see their loved one as still alive (because they see someone with a similar shape or build), these men and women not only saw him, but ate and drank and handled him until all doubts about his resurrection were dispelled. They refused to believe the report of the women, and when initially confronted with the risen Christ, they were

skeptical and assumed they were seeing a phantom. (Luke 24:9-12, 36-43; John 20:19-29; 1John 1:1-3). It is noteworthy that Mary mistook Jesus for a gardener; she clearly did not expect to see Jesus. (John 20:14-16).

The disciples on the way to Emmaus had to be convinced by Jesus “opening up the scriptures” to them — an appeal to reason and logic, not to emotion (Luke 24:13-27). The disciples’ subsequent preaching was based on careful reasoning from the Old Testament, as well as on their own personal experiences. (e.g. Acts 2:3,13). Since both Paul and James did not participate in this claimed emotional scene, how can the conversion of these two skeptics be explained?

Finally, and most significantly, why wouldn’t the enemies of the Christians simply have produced the body of Jesus in order to silence, once and for all, these foolish claims?

### **Wrong Tomb or Family Tomb**

It is sometimes suggested that the disciples mistakenly went to the wrong tomb and when they found it empty, they assumed Jesus had risen from the dead. A recent (2007) alternative suggested Jesus was buried in a family tomb known to the early Christians. Again, this explanation fails to account for all the known evidence.

- The disciples’ extreme reluctance to believe Jesus actually was alive from the dead.
- The NT writers state that Jesus was put in a new tomb belonging to Joseph of Arimathea (Matt 27:60).
- If no one else knew where Jesus was put, surely this man would. And if he knew, why wouldn’t others know? The same would surely be true of a family tomb. Many would know its location.

Nor does this theory account for the tomb being sealed by the Jewish authorities and being watched by a contingent of soldiers. Others may have been mistaken, but these men would not have been. And worst of all, any claims that Jesus rose from the dead would have been quickly dispatched simply by producing the body from the “right” tomb.

### **Only alternative**

The failure of all these explanations for the empty tomb leaves, by abductive reasoning, only one viable alternative: **Jesus of Nazareth rose from the dead as claimed.** *“Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he is risen, as he said” (Matt 28:5-6).*

### **Implications**

Having looked closely at the evidence that the only viable explanation for the empty tomb is the resurrection of Jesus by God, we should not be shy in setting out the implications of this fact as well. First and foremost is that the God who raised Jesus now has another substantial witness to His existence. Peter and Paul make it clear that as a consequence all men everywhere must acknowledge the God of the Bible as the only true God (Acts 3:19-26; 17:30-31).

A risen Jesus also gives us a reasonable basis for believing all that Jesus spoke and all that the Scriptures say about him is true. Jesus appealed to the Scriptures as the genuine Word of God, revealing God's purpose with man. The resurrection gives us reason to believe this is true. The resurrection was an act of Divine intervention in the affairs of men. God has promised He will intervene again, this time sending His Son to rule the world in righteousness and to establish God's kingdom on earth. If Jesus did indeed rise from the dead, we can have confidence in this future event as well.

Finally, the resurrection is the historical fact on which the hope of Christianity, the hope of the resurrection from the dead, is founded. Because it happened once in fulfillment of God's word, we have solid reasons to believe it can happen again... to us, if we are willing to join our lives to this man.

Bro L. G. Sargent summarized the implications well: "(It is) the crown in the arch of the whole structure of God's revelation... It ties together the whole of the promises and prophecies of the past and their realization in the future... It is the crux of the working of God with men" (*A Sound Mind*, p.166).

*Ted Sleeper (San Francisco Peninsula, CA)*

## **Finding Moses** **(An Archeological and Anthropological Approach)**

### **Introduction**

Over the years I have heard many arguments that the stories of the Old Testament were not actual historical events and were only meant to provide moral lessons for the children of Israel. Does it matter to us, as believers, if Moses was a real man?

Of all of the accounts recorded in Scripture, the story of Moses is one of special significance. There is no other event recorded that our Heavenly Father uses to identify Himself to his people more than how He was the one that delivered them from Egypt. Even the Lord Jesus validates the life of Moses when he makes mention of him throughout his ministry, and especially in the book of John:

*"For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?" (John 5:46-47).*

If all Scripture is given by God's inspiration, and the Lord Jesus is the son of God and our savior, then there is a compelling, logical reason to believe it is true if for no other reason than Jesus says it's true.

Logic also dictates that we shouldn't just blindly follow the Bible without validating its truthfulness. To say we believe in the Bible because the Bible says it is true does not do anything to validate our faith. The Quran and the Book of Mormon both make the same claim. One of the things that has been used to validate the truth as we know it is archeology. But archeology of itself cannot recreate a story; there exists a much broader field of study that works to incorporate not only artifacts, but also the culture and traditions of people, as well as their day to day life.

The purpose of this article is to employ this anthropological approach as we evaluate the account of Moses and see if there is any possibility that the account is historically accurate. We cannot, of course, *prove* that the story happens just the way that we tell it here, but my purpose is primarily to demonstrate that it is plausible and that the Biblical account agrees with what we know about the culture in ancient Egypt at the time. So without any further build up, let's go on a journey back to ancient Egypt in the year 1525 B.C.

## **Ancient Egypt**

Pharaoh rules the world. He is viewed as a man-god, as a representation of Osiris on earth. Osiris was the Egyptian god of the dead and he was actively working through the pharaoh. Pharaoh had a somber responsibility to maintain ma'at. Ma'at is the order and peace in the world that could only be maintained if all of the gods were happy. If the Nile does not flood, if there is famine in the land, if there is great disease afflicting the Egyptians, the pharaoh would be the one to blame. Even after death, the pharaoh would enter the afterlife and continue his role in maintaining ma'at just like the pharaohs before him.

The term "daughter of pharaoh" was much more than a reference to the offspring of Pharaoh; it was a title in itself. The "Daughter of Pharaoh" was also called the "Throne Princess" and she was considered to be a god in her own right. The Egyptians at the time believed she had "Ra-blood" (Ra, the sun god) and that validated her as being the next queen. It was also her responsibility to marry the firstborn son of Pharaoh who was considered to be the god "Horace" manifested on earth. The marriage of Horace to the Throne Princess would create a new manifestation of Osiris and Isis on Earth. Yes... that meant she was destined to marry her brother!

We began in the year 1525 B.C. because that is the approximate date of the Egyptian records that state that all male slaves were to be killed. While it does not explicitly state that the slaves were Hebrews, the rest of the story seems to match up pretty well. The pharaoh at the time would have been Thutmose I who ruled from 1526 BC – 1512 BC, which means he took immediate action when assuming power in ordering the death of the newborn males. In secular history, he is best remembered for building the Valley of the Kings and as a prominent military leader. There are no records to suggest that people looked at Thutmose I as dimwitted or slow-minded, so this leads to a troublesome question: If he was so smart, why did he not kill Moses as soon as his daughter brought the child to him? He certainly knew that this was one of the condemned Hebrew children; so did pharaoh's daughter (Exod 2:6).

The Daughter of Pharaoh, who would later become one of the very few female pharaohs, was Hatshepsut at that time. Critics will often say that if this was the case, then Scripture should have recorded her name. The simple answer is that the name of the Throne Princess was never recorded, because only the title was used as a show of respect. The only reason this woman's name is recorded in Egyptian history is because she later became a pharaoh.

As we remember from before, this woman was considered a god. Also, there are two gods that rule the Nile, Hapy and Khnum. Hapy was the god of the Nile and Khnum was the guardian of the Nile. When they are coupled with the Throne Princess, there would be than a total of three gods that found it fit to save this child's life. When pharaoh was presented with this child who was apparently blessed by the three gods, he was faced with a decision: He could fulfill his order and kill the child, or he could try and maintain ma'at and not offend the gods by slaughtering the child.

When this is coupled with the fact that a 10-12 year old Hatshepsut presents the child to her father and says that his name is Moses, one might say she named him after her father, (Ma'at, or it could also mean "draw out of water").

As the years passed, Hatshepsut marries her brother Thutmose II and they have seven daughters and no sons. This was a problem as far as succession was concerned because the dynasty was supposed to continue through the marriage of Horace to the Throne Princess to create the equivalent of Osiris and Isis on earth. Thutmose did have other children through other wives; the firstborn son of Thutmose II was Thutmose III.

This situation created a very interesting political situation. Who would be the next pharaoh and ruler of Egypt? Moses was the man who was blessed by the gods and Thutmose III was the firstborn son of the present pharaoh, but not the son of the Throne Princess.

*"By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season" (Heb 11: 24-25).*

Hebrews 11 paints a picture of a path to being pharaoh being well paved for Moses. It was his for the taking!

The validity of this account is reinforced because there are Egyptian records that show Thutmose II had prophesied that Thutmose III would become pharaoh. There would be no need for a prophecy if the line of succession was uncontested. Thutmose II's prophecy never came to fruition as Hatshepsut assumed the throne for herself and made Thutmose III a general in her army. Thutmose III excelled in that role and never wanted to give it up. He did, though, ultimately become pharaoh after Hatshepsut mysteriously disappeared.

There were many rules in the land of Egypt, but there is one rule of particular interest: no Egyptian was supposed to harm or kill another Egyptian. This rule was so strongly followed that even if a pharaoh wrongfully harmed an Egyptian, he would be punished (pharaoh was responsible only to the high priest).

## **The Exodus**

Scripture tells us that not long after the children of Israel are set free, pharaoh sends his army after them to bring them back. Many people look at that event and say the account of Moses cannot be true because there is no record of it. That seems like a logical point because it is true that there is no record of it happening. But

to be fair, there also is no Egyptian record of any of the ancient Egyptians losing a battle. Ever. In fact, there is an Egyptian record of the battle of Kedesh where Rameses the Great made a monument to his great victory. Upon the evaluation of other ancient records from other countries, it turns out the victory was grossly overstated and it was really more of a draw.

After the events of the Red Sea several things happened. First, Amenotep II sent out another army to Asia and captured 750,000 people that were brought to Egypt to work as slaves and then someone destroyed all of Hatshepsut's cartouches, effectively killing her in the afterlife. If Amenotep II did break all of Hatshepsut's cartouches, he was *taking a big risk of angering all of the gods and upsetting the balance in the world*. One could argue that in his mind the balance was already upset and that ma'at was already destroyed. No one can fault him his anger though. If Hatshepsut was the one that pulled Moses from the river, then he felt she was to blame for all of the misfortune that he had encountered.

Was this the way that it really happened? No one knows for sure. Was Hatshepsut the Daughter of Pharaoh that was spoken of in Exodus and Hebrews? Perhaps we will find out in the Kingdom age. The purpose of this article is not to provide the exact story of what happened, it is to provide plausibility. Does the historical account presented in the book of Exodus agree with what we know of the history and culture of ancient Egypt? I believe it does and I believe that the events really did take place. If they did not, our hope is lost.

We mentioned earlier the words of Jesus:

*“For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?” (John 5:46-47).*

These words are as true today as when they were when Jesus first spoke them. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

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## What Happened To Archaeology?

### Development of a chronology

Like the timelines developed to support the belief in evolution, archeology has not been immune to similar pressures to support anti-Biblical biases. In an earlier time, archeologist routinely used the Bible as the basis of their explorations. In the early 19th century when Napoleon brought the treasures of ancient Egypt to the attention of the world, fascination with Egypt grew enormously. This ultimately led to the development of a chronology that relied (to a large extent) on a list of pharaohs compiled by the Egyptian priest Manetho in the 3rd century BC. Carbon-14 dating, especially for the Middle and Old Egyptian Kingdoms, and the alleged pre-dynastic period, has been used to provide some support for this dating. The Egyptian chronology, though, put the beginning of Egypt's Old Kingdom to be around 3000 BC, or some 700 years *before* Noah's flood. Hence the problem.

It is not just the Biblical account of the flood that has been called into question by this new chronology. All the history from Abraham, to Joseph, to Moses, to Joshua down through the end of the Northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah has also been called into question. The Dec. 18, 1995 cover of Time magazine asked the question, "Is The Bible Fact or Fiction?" Here are some of their answers: "(Years) of searching have convinced all but the most conservative experts that Abraham, and the rest of the Patriarchs, were inventions of the Bible's authors." "Apart from the Bible, there is no evidence that (Moses) ever lived." "The walls of (Jericho) did come tumbling down, say most historians, but centuries before Moses' protégé could have arrived." ("Are the Bible's Stories True?" — sidebar to featured article.) Here are the critical problems when following the Egyptian Chronology:



## **Problems of Egyptian chronology**

### **The Exodus Problem**

The Exodus from Egypt was not only the most significant event in the history of the Jewish people; it was also an unprecedented and unequalled catastrophe for Egypt. In the course of the pharaoh's stubborn refusal to let the Israelites leave and the resultant plagues sent by God, Egypt was devastated. Hail, disease and infestations obliterated Egypt's produce and livestock, while the plague of the first-born stripped the land of its elite, leaving inexperienced second sons to cope with the economic disaster. The drowning of the ruling pharaoh and the Egyptian army in the Red Sea left Egypt open and vulnerable to foreign invasions.

Such a momentous series of events *must* find a reflection somewhere in the archeological record, but, according to the currently accepted chronology, in the year of the Exodus, the greatest warlord Egypt ever knew, Thutmose III, embarked on a series of conquests, extending the Egyptian sphere of influence and tribute over Palestine, Syria and crossing the Euphrates into Mesopotamia itself. No archeological evidence exists from this time supporting any of the Biblical claims.

### **The Wilderness Problem**

Forty years is a very long time for 2 million people to live in the wilderness. The considerable time they would have spent in various locations should have left evidence. Archeologists, using the standard chronology, have not found any such evidence.

### **The Canaan Problem**

The problem only gets worse in trying to find evidence for the major devastation of cities recorded in the book of Joshua. Archeological evidence bears little resemblance to the Biblical account of the conquest of Canaan. Archaeologists say Israel "emerged" from among the Canaanite peoples without a conquest. In other

The Current Archeological View of the History of the Land of Israel

PROTO-CANAANITES	AMORITES	HYKSOS EMPIRE	CANAANITES	NORTHERN TRIBES
				SOUTHERN TRIBES
EARLY BRONZE AGE	MIDDLE BRONZE AGE		LATE BRONZE AGE	IRON AGE
CANAANITES	CONQUEST & JUDGES	UNITED MONARCHY (David-Solomon)	DIVIDED MONARCHY (Israel - Judah)	SAMARITANS (Israel in exile)
				JUDAH

The Biblical View of the History of the Land of Israel  
(Chart from: <http://www.starways.net/lisa/essays/exodus.html>)

words, there is virtually *no* evidence for the mighty overthrow of the Canaanites as recorded in the Bible.

### The Iron Age Problem

There were invasions, but they were from the north, from Syria and Mesopotamia, and they came in several waves, unlike the lightning conquest under Joshua. The people who settled the land after the invasions also came from the north, and seemed to settle an empty land after it had been destroyed by others. The south remained in the hands of the Bronze Age inhabitants, albeit on a lower material level. (See chart above.)

The conclusions drawn from this evidence? The people in the south, who supposedly constituted the kingdom of Judah, have been determined to be of Canaanite descent, if not biologically, then culturally. And the people in the north, supposedly the ten tribes of Israel, have been determined to have no relation to the tribes of the south. The idea of twelve tribes descended from the sons of Jacob has been removed from the history books and re-catalogued under “Mythology, Jewish.”

### The Real problem

The acceptance of the Conventional Egyptian Chronology has not been universal, but the use of it in evaluating and dating archeological evidence is so common and dominant that Bible dictionaries and popular archeology books and magazine all reflect the same belief: *Little, if any, evidence exists to support the plain reading of the Old Testament.* As the Time article put it: “...parts of the Old Testament where the evidence is contradictory or still absent, (include) slavery in Egypt, the existence of Moses, the Exodus and Joshua’s military conquest of the Holy Land...”

Kathleen Kenyon, who excavated at Jericho for six years, found no evidence of destruction at that time” (p. 54).

However, the real problem turns out to be the Conventional Egyptian Chronology (CEC) itself, *not* the Bible. The flaws in this chronology have produced continuing problems in trying to correlate finds throughout the eastern Mediterranean world. A number of archeologists have begun calling for its revision. In *Centuries of Darkness*, Peter James (British historian and author specializing in the ancient history and archaeology of the Eastern Mediterranean region) calls traditional chronology a “gigantic academic blunder.” David M Rohl writes, “The only real solution to the archaeological problems which have been created is to pull down the whole structure and start again, reconstructing from the foundations upward.”<sup>1</sup>

An illustration of the mismatch can be seen from an article in *Biblical Archeology Review* of Sep/Oct 1987. The authors looked at the cities that Joshua attacked and destroyed. According to the current dating of these sites, there is no evidence for any destruction at all by Joshua (Late Bronze Age). When the authors examined these cities during an earlier period (Middle Bronze Age), suddenly there was significant evidence of destruction or abandonment consistent with the Biblical account.

The authors’ conclusion: “In summary, the chart reveals a basic inconsistency between the situation at the end of the Late Bronze Age and the Biblical account of the conquest of Canaan, while the situation at the end of Middle Bronze II is consistent with the Biblical account.”<sup>2</sup>

### **One possible correction**

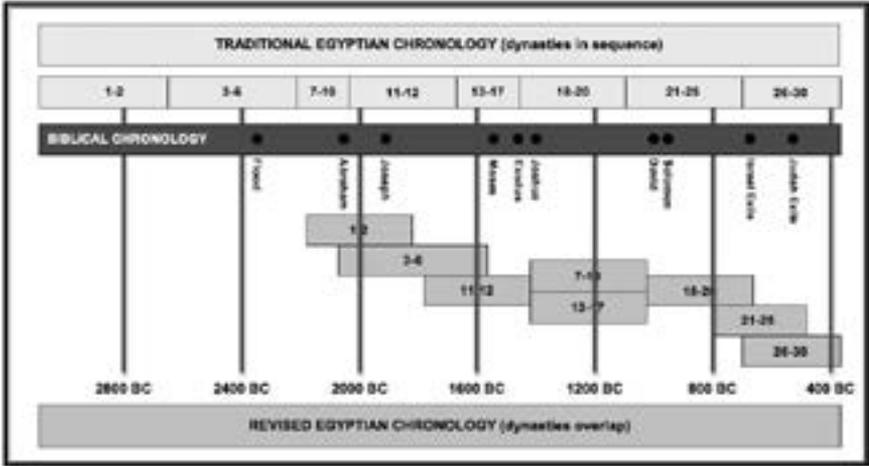
David Down (field archaeologist; editor of *Archeological Diggings.com.au*), in *Unwrapping the Pharaohs*, synthesized the work of many experts to produce what he feels is a cohesive narrative consistent with the Bible. He points out many synchronisms between the histories of Israel and Egypt, providing a plausible identification for many of the characters found in the Old Testament. His work also seems consistent with the history of surrounding nations. (Short article here: [http://creation.com/searching-for-moses.](http://creation.com/searching-for-moses))

When the Egyptian chronology is corrected, the missing evidence for Joseph, Israel as slaves in Egypt, Moses as potential heir-apparent to the throne, the Exodus and its devastating effects on Egypt, the wilderness wanderings, Joshua’s dramatic conquest of Canaan, Israel under David and Solomon as the super power of the Middle East, through the destruction of Israel and Judah — *all* these missing pieces now find reflections in the archeological record. The alignment is a powerful confirmation that God’s Word really can be trusted.

The chart below, based on the proposed revision by archeologist David Down, illustrates the contrast between the Conventional Egyptian Chronology and **Down’s revised chronology**.

Another researcher, Patrick Clarke (specializes in pharaonic tombs in the Valley of the Kings; their architecture, artwork and afterlife texts), has a series of research

articles arguing for a slightly different lineup. (His conclusion places Joseph nearer to 1750 BC and would have Mentohotep II as the pharaoh in Joseph's day, which would alter the overlaps in the dynasties.)



### Why should I care?

Archeological discoveries once were seen as confirming evidence of the validity and truthfulness of the historical narratives of the Bible. Archeologists with Bible in hand searched out ancient ruins to discover this evidence. Not all archeologists were happy with this approach; some had little respect for the Bible, much less a desire to authenticate it. When archeologists began put together a timeline of the ancient Middle East based on the Egyptian king lists in the early 1900s, the pressure to expel the Bible as a legitimate historical text began. Today, as the *Times* article mentioned earlier demonstrates, the Bible has been completely dismissed.

So why should you care? Because each of us ultimately has to make a decision: Did God speak through the Bible or is the Bible just another ancient text with lots of myths? The first choice acknowledges there is a God and that He has something to say to me. The second choice is to jettison God altogether and live in a meaningless, directionless, and sterile world.

### Resources:

For helpful discussions of the dating problems behind the traditional chronology, see the suggested references below. These are all from researchers and scientists that accept the Bible to actually be God's inspired word.

- 1) Dr. Gary Bates, *Egyptian chronology and the Bible—framing the issues*. creation.com/egypt-chronology. 2 Nov 2014.
- 2) David Down & Dr. John Ashton, *Unwrapping The Pharaohs*, Ch. 28, “A Correct Chronology”.
- 3) Dr. Elizabeth Mitchell, *The New Answers Book 2*, Ch. 24, “Doesn't Egyptian

Chronology Prove That the Bible Is Unreliable?”

- 4) Patrick Clarke, *Joseph's Zaphenath Paaneah—a chronological key*. Journal Of Creation 27(3) 2013
- 5) An interesting new video: “Patterns of Evidence: The Exodus”. This video explores the striking archaeological evidence that Hebrews once existed in Egypt. It also demonstrates some of the difficulty behind establishing an exact Egyptian chronology.

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**Notes:**

1. David Rohl: *Pharaohs and Kings: A Biblical Quest*, 1997, p. 9. (David is Egyptologist and former director of the Institute for the Study of Interdisciplinary Sciences.)
2. Bimson, John J., Livingston, David. “*Redating the Exodus*”. *Biblical Archaeology Review*, Sep/Oct 1987, 40-48, 51-53, 66-68.)

## **Beware of Premature Conclusions about Alleged Biblical “Contradictions”**

Some people look at apparent contradictions in the Bible and see a justification for not accepting the Bible as divinely inspired. People of faith look at apparent contradictions and put them in a mental folder awaiting their explanation. Often further research produces a reasonable explanation. In some cases we await future developments. The Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus, points out how an apparent contradiction between the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel was seized upon by King Zedekiah and his advisors and used as a pretext for ignoring their prophecies.<sup>1</sup>

### **The background story**

The setting for the incident is the events surrounding the Babylonian captivity of Israel. The Babylonian captivity actually occurred in three distinct stages over a 20 year period. In the first, Daniel and his friends were taken to Babylon (2Kgs 24:1, Jer 25:1, Dan 1:1-7). In the second stage, 10,000 were taken including Ezekiel and King Jehoiachin (2Kgs 24:10-16; Ezek 1:1-2, Esth 2:5-6). The final stage resulted in the horrific destruction of Jerusalem and the temple with much loss of life and all but a few being taken to Babylon (2Kgs 25:1-27). Jeremiah was not taken in any of these stages, but rather taken to Egypt by the remaining rebels (Jer 43:6).

### **Prophetic contradictions?**

Ezekiel was prophesying from captivity while Jeremiah was prophesying in Jerusalem. Both prophets, at God’s direction, were desperately trying to get Zedekiah and the Jews to repent and thereby save their nation from total destruction.

Ezekiel’s prophecies were brought to Jerusalem. So, when the Jews in powers found a particular section of his prophecy that seemed to disagree with Jeremiah’s prophecy, they used the apparent contradiction as justification for ignoring all the warnings of the prophets, to continue in their evil practices. (How prone we all are to seek to discredit that which is opposed to our preference!)

We pick up story in Josephus’ “Antiquities of the Jews” Chapt. 7. (Emphasis is mine)

“Now as to Zedekiah himself, while he heard the prophet (Jeremiah) speak, he believed him and agreed to everything as true, and supposed it was for his advantage; but then his friends perverted him, and dissuaded him from what the prophet advised, and obliged him to do **what they pleased**. Ezekiel also foretold in Babylon what calamities were coming upon the people, which when he (Jehoiachin who was also in captivity) heard he sent accounts of them unto Jerusalem. But Zedekiah did not believe their prophecies, for the reason following: It happened that the two prophets agreed with one another in what they said as in all other things, that the city should be taken, and Zedekiah himself should be taken captive; but Ezekiel disagreed with him, and said that Zedekiah should not see Babylon, while Jeremiah said to him, that the king of Babylon should carry him away thither in bonds. And because they did not both say the same thing as to this circumstance, **he disbelieved what they both appeared to agree in**, and condemned them as not speaking truth therein, although all the things foretold him did come to pass according to their prophecies, as we shall show upon a fitter opportunity.”

Here are the relevant verses from the two prophecies in question. (Again, emphasis is mine.)

*“And Zedekiah king of Judah shall not escape out of the hand of the Chaldeans, but shall surely be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon, and shall speak with him mouth to mouth, and **his eyes shall behold his eyes**; And he shall lead Zedekiah to Babylon, and there shall he be until I visit him, said the Lord; though ye fight with the Chaldeans, ye shall not prosper” (Jer 32:4-5).*

*“My net also will I spread upon him, and he shall be taken in my snare and I will bring him to Babylon to the land of the Chaldeans; **yet shall he not see it**, though he shall die there” (Ezek. 12:13).*

The apparent contradiction was that Jeremiah said that King Zedekiah would actually look into the eyes of the king of Babylon. “...and his **eyes shall behold his eyes**...”. Ezekiel said “...I will bring him (Zedekiah) to Babylon...**yet shall he not see it**.” It looked like one prophet was saying Zedekiah would see the king of Babylon and one said he would not. How could Zedekiah see the king of Babylon and not see Babylon? But in the end events fell out in such a way that both prophecies were literally fulfilled down to the last detail as follows:

*“Then the city was broken up, and all the men of war fled, and went forth out of the city by night by the way of the gate between the two walls, which was by the king’s garden; (now the Chaldeans were by the city round about:) and they went by the way of the plain. But the army of the Chaldeans pursued after the king, and overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho; and all his army was scattered from him. Then they took the king, and carried him up unto the king of Babylon to Riblah in the land of Hamath; where he gave judgment upon him. And the king of Babylon slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes: he slew also all the princes of Judah in Riblah. Then he **put out the***

*eyes of Zedekiah; and the king of Babylon bound him in chains, and carried him to Babylon, and put him in prison till the day of his death” (Jer 52:7-11).*

Thus everything happened exactly as prophesied. King Zedekiah “...looked into the eyes of the king of Babylon...” exactly as Jeremiah had prophesied; **but not in the city of Babylon**. And he was brought to the city of Babylon **but he never saw it**...exactly as Ezekiel had prophesied.

### **The point to us**

Josephus hits the nail on the head. Because Zedekiah did not want to believe Jeremiah and Ezekiel “...**he disbelieved what they both appeared to agree in**, and condemned them as not speaking truth therein, though all the things foretold him did come to pass according to their prophecies...”.

When someone is telling us something we do not want to hear, we become professional fault finders. We start looking for any evidence that will enable us to reject what is being said. We do this in our daily lives and we see it done by those who would justify their rejection of the Bible as the word of God. Because all their questions cannot be answered at this time to their satisfaction, they reject the preponderance of indisputable examples of fulfilled prophecy that authenticate the Bible as a divinely inspired work.

It is not easy to be open-minded when the discussion is accumulating evidence that opposes our current position in any area of our lives. Thankfully, John Thomas was an open-minded scholar. If he were not, he would still be in the Disciples of Christ.

*Ken Sommerville (Simi Hills, CA)*

#### **Notes:**

1. Flavius Josephus wrote in approximately 93 or 94 A.D. The details for this article are taken from *The Antiquities of the Jews*, translated by William Whiston.

*The Bible has many seeming contradictions within its pages. For example, the four Gospels give four differing accounts as to what was written on the sign that hung on the cross.*

*“And above His head they put up the charge against Him which read, ‘THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS’” (Matt 27:37).*

*“The inscription of the charge against Him read, ‘THE KING OF THE JEWS’” (Mark 15:26).*

*“Now there was also an inscription above Him, ‘THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS’” (Luke 23:38).*

*“Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It was written, ‘JESUS THE NAZARENE, THE KING OF THE JEWS’” (John 19:19).*

However, those who trust God have no problem harmonizing the Gospels. There is no contradiction if the sign simply said, *“This is Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews.”*

## Section 3: Origin and Translations of the Bible

### How We got our Bible: Preservation and Transmission

#### Bible texts

For the text of the Bible, we will present two different accounts, one for the Old Testament (OT) and one for the New Testament (NT). The OT has something like a dozen primary sources,<sup>1</sup> whereas the NT has more than five thousand. Variations abound in the NT sources; but these variations are all minor and confident reconstruction of an accurate “original” is still possible in all but a few cases. In contrast, there are very few variations in the OT sources; most variations have been eliminated because almost all old and defective manuscripts were destroyed to avoid flaws being promulgated in the sacred texts.

The study of these issues is called textual criticism. For the most part, we depend heavily on others in this area of Bible study; one brother put it this way, “We need to be contextual scholars, not textual scholars.” That said, it is useful to know a little bit about the subject.

#### Old Testament

Two definitive works on textual criticism of the OT are:

- Ernst Würthwein (1988, 2nd edition), *The Text of the Old Testament*, translated by Erroll F. Rhodes, Eerdmans: Grand Rapids.
- Emmanuel Tov (1992), *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, Fortress Press: Minneapolis.

The primary OT sources include the Masoretic Text (MT, Hebrew), the Samaritan Pentateuch (written in the Samaritan alphabet), the Septuagint (LXX, Greek), the Targums (Aramaic, including explanatory glosses), the Peshitta (Syriac, a dialect of Aramaic), the Vulgate (Latin), and the Dead Sea Scrolls.

The Masoretes (“Transmitters” or “Tradition Keepers”) were a group of Jewish scribes-scholars based in Tiberias, Jerusalem, and Babylon between the sixth and tenth centuries AD. The ben Asher family from Tiberia was largely responsible for producing and preserving the MT. The MT is widely viewed to be the most accurate text of the OT. The ben Asher Masoretes not only determined the proper Hebrew consonants of the OT text, they also added vowel pointing for vocalization, para-textual elements (e.g., division of the text into sections), and apparatus documenting their decisions and alternatives. The most famous in this family was Aaron ben Moses ben Asher, who was a scribe living during the first half of the tenth century. He made it his life’s work to understand and preserve God’s Word, a true “modern” Ezra (cf. Ezra 7; Neh 8). Once the Masoretes had created their definitive text, efforts were made to destroy all other OT manuscripts because they were deemed to be inferior.

Two of the existing manuscripts of the MT are the Aleppo Codex (A, 925 AD) and the Codex Leningrad (L, 1009 AD). Printed editions of the Hebrew Bible include:

- *Biblia Hebraica* (BH or BHK) (1951), edited by R. Kittel and P. Kahle, in Hebrew, based on L.
- *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (BHS) (1969, 1977), edited by K. Elliger and W. Rudolf, in Hebrew, based on L.
- *The Hebrew University Bible (HUB), The Book of Isaiah, Vols I-II* (1975, 1971), Moshe H. Goshen-Gottstein, in Hebrew, based on A.

In addition to the text itself, these Hebrew Bibles include marginal apparatus showing textual variations, etc. These resources are for serious students who know Biblical Hebrew. They are the starting point for most all English translations of the OT.

The Dead Sea Scrolls are a collection of 981 texts that were found in 11 caves at Qumran between 1946 and 1956. Most of them are in Hebrew, with some in Aramaic, and a few in Greek. There are 225 Biblical texts, including at least some portion of 38 of the 39 OT books (the exception being Esther). Psalms, the Torah, and Isaiah are heavily represented. These scrolls come from much earlier than the MT manuscripts; their discovery pushed the date of our earliest manuscripts back more than 1,000 years. The truly amazing thing about the Dead Sea Scrolls is how much they confirmed the MT, which significantly increased scholarly confidence in the text of the OT.

## **New Testament**

There are many useful books on the textual criticism of the NT, including:

- Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland (1995, English translation, paperback), *The Text of the New Testament*, translated by Erroll F. Rhodes, Eerdmans: Grand Rapids.
- Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Bruce M. Metzger, et al. (1998, 8th edition), *Nestle-Aland Greek-English New Testament*, German Bible Society: Stuttgart.
- Bruce M. Metzger (1994, 2nd edition), *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, German Bible Society: Stuttgart.
- Philip W. Comfort (2008), *New Testament Text and Translation Commentary*, Tyndall House: Carol Stream, IL.

The primary NT sources fall into three categories: 128 papyri, 323 uncials (upper case letters), and 2,882 minuscules (lower case cursive letters). In addition, there are over 2,400 lectionaries (collections of passages read in worship services). The papyri are dated from 250 AD and on. Three of the earliest and more important uncials are Sinaiticus (*Aleph*, 4th c.), Alexandrinus (A, 5th c.), and Vaticanus (B, 4th c.). The minuscules are from the 10th c. and on. A couple of the lectionaries go back as far as the 4th c.

Though there are hundreds of thousands of variations, they are almost all minor. By comparing all the witnesses, it is usually possible to determine accurately what the “original” text must have been.

Scholars who specialize in textual criticism have identified a common set of scribal errors that lead to variations. Understanding these makes it possible to determine when they have occurred, hence how to reconstruct the “original”. To illustrate, here are some examples:

- Repeated words or phrases can cause the intervening text to be deleted. For example, some manuscripts leave out Luke 12:9 because it ends with the same phrase as Luke 12:8; i.e., they both end with “*before the angels of God.*” A similar thing happens in some Coptic manuscripts of John 17 which omit verses 15-16 because verses 14 and 16 both end with “*even as I am not of the world.*”
- Homonyms can cause the correct word to be replaced by another word that sounds the same. Analogous examples in English are common: e.g., “there”, “their”, and “they’re” are often confused and so are “to”, “too”, and “two”. (It is believed this occurred because the monks who produced the copies did so by listening to one reading the text).
- Phrases from parallel accounts are sometimes inserted into a text. This kind of error occurs occasionally in the Gospels.
- Intentional corruption of the text to support traditional doctrinal positions. The most famous example of this is reflected in the KJV of 1John 5:6-8. A single Greek manuscript was created in which a forged verse 7 was inserted to provide explicit support for the doctrine of the Trinity.
- Another kind of problem can happen as a result of lectionary usage. Citing Dean Burgon, Harry Whittaker suggests that this is the reason some manuscripts leave out Mark 12:9-20 and John 8:1-11. (see *Studies in the Gospels: A New Extended Edition*, pp. 846-847).

Joe Hill (Austin Leander, TX)

Notes:

1. Treating the collection of Quram texts as one source.

## The Canon of Scripture

“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom 10:17).

### Introduction

Bro. Joe Hill’s article told of the wonderful way in which the Bible text was preserved and transmitted through history, and so used by those who translated it into English. But the question remains — “How did these particular texts come to be included in what we know as the Bible?” After all, many religious texts were written during the time of the Old and New Testaments. Which of these should be included and which should be rejected? What was the basis for these decisions? Who made them? Finding the answers to these questions involves looking at what has become known as the *Canon* of Scripture.

This somewhat odd-looking word has nothing to do with artillery, but is from the Greek *kanon* and probably borrowed from the Hebrew *qanon* meaning a reed or rod (see Ezek 40:5 and Gal 6:16). We get our English word “cane” from these

and since reeds and rods were used to measure things in those times, the idea of a canon being a support, a standard or a rule came into being.

Thus, to speak of writings being “canonical,” or “part of the Canon,” is to refer to those writings which have become part of the books which are regarded as having Divine authority and were inspired by God. But it is important to understand that there is a difference between a book’s authority and whether or not it is canonical. Whether or not a book is properly included in the Canon is based on its authority (but not *vice versa*). For example, the Gospel of John had its own intrinsic authority from the time it was written, based on the text itself, having been Divinely inspired. Or Paul’s first Epistle to the Corinthians, which plainly claims to be speaking on behalf of God: “*If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord*” (1Cor 14:36-37).

However, both of these books only became canonical when they were generally accepted by the ecclesiastical authorities as being written under the Hand of Providence.<sup>1</sup> The books of the Bible have their own intrinsic authority, and no human group or institution can (or indeed needs to) confer this authority. These sacred writings were authoritative long before there were any religious councils deeming them so, or books to incorporate them.

It is very important to be clear about the development of the Canon. It is not an evolutionary process by which certain religious writings were increasingly accepted and given special status by a religious group (church). It was not (and remains not) a means by which sacred status was conferred on particular writings. The development of the Canon was rather mankind’s response to the Divine authority inherent in these Biblical writings from their beginnings. Said more succinctly, the Bible is not an authorized collection of books; rather it is a collection of authoritative books!

### **The Canon of the Old Testament**

*“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds;” (Heb 1:1-2).*

Most of the details by which the Old Testament writings were recognized as authoritative and to be set apart from other Jewish works have been lost to history, but it is clear that, by the time of Jesus, the Canon of what we now call the Old Testament had been fixed for some time.

The Jews divided their Scriptures into three parts: The Law, The Prophets and The Writings. The Law was composed of the five books of Moses (what we know as Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). The Prophets consisted of the four “Former Prophets” (our Joshua, Judges, 1&2 Samuel, 1&2 Kings) and the four “Latter Prophets” (our Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, plus the Book of the Twelve — our Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi). The Writings were a collection of

eleven works (our Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ruth, Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, 1&2 Chronicles). This grouping of twenty-four Old Testament “books” (remember that our modern form of books is very different from the ancient Hebrews’) was the original count of the Jews as far back as we can trace it. Later, certain Jews appended Ruth to Judges and Lamentations to Jeremiah to get a correspondence with the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet, but this seems to be somewhat of a contrivance.

The earliest Jewish scholars of whom we have records indicate that God had given his Word in twenty-four books. The Jewish historian Josephus was one of those who mentioned the Hebrew counting of twenty-two, but refers to every book in what has become our full modern list of thirty-nine. Early Christian writers, including Origen (184 – 253 A.D.) and Jerome (347 – 420 A.D.), all confirm the number of books accepted and listed by Josephus.

Much New Testament evidence clearly shows that, when the Gospel and Epistles were written, there was a definite and fixed “canon” of the Old Testament. Repeated phrases such as “the Scripture” (John 10:35, 19:36; 1Pet 1:20), “holy Scriptures” (Rom 1:2), “the Law and the Prophets” (Matt 5:17, 7:12, 22:40) create the unmistakable idea that there was a complete and sacred collection of Jewish writings set apart from other literature.

Jesus recognizes the tripartite division of the Hebrew Scriptures when he speaks of “the Law of Moses, and the prophets and the psalms” and applies them and their fulfillment to himself: *“And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me”* (Luke 24:44).

In another instance, Jesus may also have alluded to this grouping (and ordering) when he says: *“That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar”* (Matt 23:35). While Abel was the first righteous man in history to suffer persecution from the wicked, someone named Zechariah was not chronologically the last martyr named in the Old Testament. However, there was a Zechariah (2Chron. 24:20-21) who may have been the final one recorded in the last book of the Hebrew Bible at the time of Jesus.

### **The Canon of the New Testament**

*“For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled”* (Matt 5:18).

Compared to the Old Testament Canon, we know a great deal about the development of the New Testament Canon. This is not surprising, since the books of the New Testament were written over a much shorter time period (less than 50 years versus more than 1,000 years). In addition, many more documents survived from the first few centuries after Christ than from antiquity, and Jewish practice from Old Testament times required their old scrolls to be buried rather than preserved. All of these factors make it much easier to trace the history of the

New Testament texts, their distribution throughout the early Christian church, and the process of recognizing their Divine origin.

As an illustration, a surviving manuscript, written by Justin Martyr in the middle of the second century noted that at Christian services on Sunday, “memoirs of the apostles” were read together with “writings of the prophets.” It is clear that, not long after the passing of the first generation of believers, written materials were being circulated and read generally throughout the newly-formed churches.

In the early Church, there was no thought of developing a “New Testament.” The Scripture of God was the Old Testament as it had come down from the Jews. Like the Lord Jesus himself, the apostles “opened up the Scriptures” (i.e., the Old Testament) and showed how Jesus was the fulfillment of the promises contained therein. They were living witnesses to the signs and wonders he performed, and could testify personally to his resurrection. Early believers felt that the return of Christ was imminent and they likely had no thought of creating writings which would be read two millennia later.

However, as the good news of the Gospel spread throughout the Roman Empire, and as (from the believers’ perspective) the return of Jesus was delayed, and as the eyewitnesses began to die off (from both natural and unnatural causes), written materials began to take on greater and greater significance for the new community.

From early on, the followers of Jesus had begun to write of their experiences with Jesus and of His teachings (the earliest New Testament book [James] was probably written by 46 A.D.). It was inevitable that these “first-hand” accounts would become accepted as authoritative and be collected into a single whole. From the time they were written, the Apostle Paul’s letters were seen as valuable, not just to whom they were addressed, but to the community as a whole. As a result, they were copied and circulated across what was becoming a far-flung community of believers.

There is a natural progression we can see in the development of the New Testament Canon. Christ stressed to his followers the importance of the Scriptures and how he came not to abolish but to fulfill them. The initial authority of the early church was the words of Christ and the events of his life, death and resurrection. He chose his apostles as his witnesses, and their words (whether oral or written) would have carried Divine authority.

The need to preserve these early testimonies was also driven by the need to protect the Truth from the false teachers of whom even Jesus warned his believers. In particular, the rise of a group known as the Gnostics in the late first and early second centuries made it imperative that the authentic writings of the apostles, as well as Luke and Paul, be preserved.

Other religious writings were also in circulation at the same time, some of which have survived until today, including “The epistle of Barnabas” and “the Shepherd of Hermes”. Although beyond the scope of this article, you can find more about them on the internet.

As these “collections” of materials were assembled at different times and in different places, it was inevitable that there would be some differences in these early volumes. Not all of the books in what we now know as the New Testament were received without hesitation. For example, uncertainty over the authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews presented a temporary obstacle to full acceptance. However, most of the writings were generally embraced as having inspired authorship from the first.

Fragmentary evidence shows that a list of canonical books existed as early as 170 A.D. The “Muratorian Fragment,” published in 1740 A.D., indicates that even that far back there were four Gospels, the book of Acts, thirteen epistles from Paul, John’s Revelation, as well as letters from Jude and 1&2 John as having full acceptance as canonical and being read in the churches. The only New Testament books missing from this list are the letters to the Hebrews (uncertain authorship), James, 1&2 Peter and (possibly) 3 John. The Fragment also mentions two documents, but indicates that “some of our people do not want to have them read in the church.”

*One thing must be emphatically stated. The New Testament books did not become authoritative for the Church because they were formally included in a canonical list; on the contrary, the Church included them in her canon because she already regarded them as divinely inspired, recognizing their innate worth and general apostolic authority, direct or indirect.*

*(Quoted from FF Bruce)*

By the third century, according to Origen of Alexandria, even these other works were being accepted by most believers, albeit with some still holding reservations. One of Origen’s later writings compares these New Testament writings with the trumpets which felled the walls of Jericho, and, with certain dramatic flourishes, enumerates all of the books we know as the New Testament. All of the uncertainties are gone by the mid-fourth century; in 367 A.D., Athanasius of Alexandria published a list of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament that were accepted in his time. These are the same books which are recognized today, and he adds the following postscript: “*these are the springs of salvation ... Let no one add anything to them or take anything away from them.*”

Good advice then and good advice now. The Bible owes its authority to no individual, group, or religious body. It has been fairly said that no churches control the Canon, but the Canon controls the churches. Divine authority was (and remains) inherent in the books of the Bible themselves.

*Kevin Flatley (Pittsburgh, Pa)*

Notes:

1. This is especially true of the NT: the process by which the OT canon was formed it not known.

## The Apocrypha

*"For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book:" (Rev 22:18).*

*After the Old Testament canon was recognized as closed by the Jews, and prior to the close of the New Testament period, many other religious writings were in existence and being circulated. Among these are certain writings which have been collected into a body of literature we know as "the Apocrypha," a word taken from the Greek (by way of Medieval Latin) and meaning hidden, secret, or obscure. These were all written between 200 B.C. and 100 A.D., and while not included in the Hebrew Canon, were included with some versions of the famous Septuagint Greek-language translation of the Hebrew Scriptures.*

*The fifteen books traditionally included in the Apocrypha are 1&2 Esdras, Tobit, Judith, Additions to Esther, Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, the Letter of Jeremiah, the Prayer of Azariah, Susanna, Bel and the Dragon, the Prayer of Manasseh, and 1&2 Maccabees.*

*Some (or all) of these books are considered part of the Bible used by certain religious groups (e.g., Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox) and are considered canonical (or more properly termed, "Deuterocanonical," or part of a second, and presumably lower-order, canon of Scripture).*

*The books themselves are a mixture of various types of writings – historical, legendary, prophetic, and devotional – and include fables, purported additional details of Biblical events, rules for personal conduct, and some history of the time between the Testaments.*

*Although some of these writings may have value (e.g., the Prayer of Manasseh has wonderful examples of repentance, and Maccabees shed light on historical events), should they be part of the Canon of Scripture? Consider this:*

- They were never part of the Hebrew canon*
- They were never accepted by Jesus or the Apostles (no quotes from or references to them)*
- They were not accepted by early Jewish writers, such as Josephus*
- They do not contain the same intrinsic qualities of inspired work (indeed, many of them are obvious fables and/or contain errors of historical and geographic fact)*
- They do not claim Divine inspiration (and some actually disclaim it)*
- They contain support for doctrines found nowhere else in Scripture*
- They have always been of uncertain status*

*In summary, there are good reasons to exclude them from the Canon of Scripture.*

## The Bible Today

As a young Sunday school student, I remember being astounded to learn that the English language had not yet been spoken anywhere in the world when Jesus and his Apostles taught the Gospel — it hadn't even been invented yet. On the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit allowed people from “every nation under heaven” to hear the message in their own language, English was not one of them. The Bible which we revere and believe to be the inspired word of God is, of course, a translation from the original Hebrew, Aramaic<sup>1</sup>, and Greek Scriptures. This article will focus on English Bible translations and highlight questions to consider when selecting versions for personal study, public reading, and teaching/preaching.

### A short history of the English Bible translations

The English language probably came into existence sometime during the 5th century, but it wasn't until the 1380's when the first hand-written English Bibles were produced by John Wycliffe. During these medieval times in Europe, the Roman Catholic Church prohibited the translation of the Scriptures into the common languages of the people and only permitted priests to read the Latin Vulgate translation.<sup>2</sup>

After the fall of Constantinople by Muslim Turks in 1453, many Greek scholars fled to Western Europe with their Greek manuscripts because the Byzantine Empire, which had been a bastion of Christian culture, was now under a foreign power with a different religion.<sup>3</sup> The influx of Eastern scholars resulted in a desire among many to examine the Scriptures in their original form rather than in Latin (Wycliffe translated his Bible directly from the Latin Vulgate). By the 16th century, the availability of original language Biblical texts caused scholars to question the authority of the church. Aiding in the Reformation movement was the first printed compilation of Greek texts (based on 6 different manuscripts), published by Erasmus in 1516.

Less than 10 years later, this Greek edition was used by William Tyndale as the basis of the first English translation of the New Testament from Greek rather than from Latin. Additional Bibles soon followed, before the publication of the King James (or Authorized) Version in 1611. What distinguished this from the earlier printed Bibles was that it was the first to be produced by a committee of scholars. The King James Version went on to become the single most influential book in history and remains the version most commonly used by Christadelphians today.

The first major English version produced after the KJV took place in 1881 when the New Testament Revised Version was published. During the more than 250 years between versions, an abundance of original language manuscripts had been discovered and these were added to the source manuscripts used in the translation. Scholars as well as the brotherhood were eager to update obsolete and antiquated words, and remove questionable grammar.<sup>4</sup> Similar thoughts were expressed in the Preface to the Emphatic Diaglott, published around the same time. Benjamin Wilson wrote, “It is generally admitted by all critics that the Authorized or Common Version of the Scriptures absolutely need revision. Obsolete words,

uncouth phrases, bad grammar and punctuation, etc., all require alteration. But this is not all. There are errors of a more serious nature which needs correction.”<sup>5</sup>

It seems that the release of the Diaglott and Revised Version made the brotherhood aware of past errors in translation. It is somewhat coincidental that the same year the complete Revised Version was published, Brother Roberts and the Birmingham ecclesia added a “Foundation Statement” to their statement of faith.<sup>6</sup> This clarification which addressed the full inspiration of Scripture included a wise comment about translation errors: “That the book currently known as the Bible... is the only source of knowledge concerning God and His purposes at present extant or available in the earth, and that the same were wholly given by inspiration of God in the writers, and are consequently without error in all parts of them, except such as may be due to errors of transcription or translation.”<sup>7</sup>

Since the introduction of the Revised Version, an abundance of English Bible translations have been introduced. Notable modern versions include The Revised Standard Version — RSV (1946), The New American Standard Bible — NASB (1971), The New International Version — NIV (1981), The English Standard Version — ESV (2001), and the New English Translation — NET (2005). Like the King James Version before them, all these Bibles have certain biases and make interpretive translation decisions which they sometimes get wrong. Despite these challenges, God ensures that people can still learn the truth of the Gospel in their own language through the use of translations — errors and all.

There is Scriptural precedent for the use of Bible translations and this fact should reassure us. During Jesus’ ministry on earth, the Jewish Scriptures most widely used in Israel were not Hebrew copies, but was a Greek translation called the Septuagint, which was not an exact word-for-word translation of the Hebrew.<sup>8</sup> Despite this fact, the inspired writers of the New Testament often quoted Old Testament passages using the Septuagint version<sup>9</sup> demonstrating that God believed it was sufficiently near the original to be quoted in the inspired word. If this was the method used by the inspired writers, it is clear that in the eyes of God that translation from the original text is an acceptable use of His word.<sup>10</sup>

### **How to choose a Bible translation**

With so many English Bibles available to us today, it is natural to wonder which is “the best” translation. The answer, of course, depends on who will be using it, and for what purpose. We use our Bibles for many purposes: daily reading, in-depth personal study, and for sharing the truth of the gospel with others. A Bible designed for general reading may have been translated with an emphasis on ease of comprehension, but this may come at the expense of accuracy. Similarly, a Bible that has extensive foot notes and center column references may be a good study Bible, but may be formatted in such a way that makes it is more difficult for some to read. A Bible that is ideally suited for preaching the gospel, likely won’t use words that need explaining or re-defining (e.g., “soul departed”, “go into hell”, etc.).

One of the best ways to understand which translation might be right for you is to read the publisher’s preface at the front of each Bible. Translations will usually

include a preface that explains the translators' approach and methodology for translating words and phrases from the original. The preface will also describe which source manuscripts were used, give information about who sponsored the translation, and share other pertinent information about that particular version. For example, some Bibles are the work of a single person and others are the work of a committee (preferred). What follows are six questions to help you understand differences in Bible translations.

### **Question 1: What is the Source used in the translation?**

Some translations are just that; entirely new translations based upon the available Hebrew and Greek manuscripts. Others are not translations, but revisions to existing English Bibles with additional reference to original language manuscripts. Here are some quotes from the preface section of various Bibles:

King James Version — The KJV was not a translation, but a revision of the Bishops' Bible: "We never thought from the beginning, that we should need to make a new translation..., but to make a good one better."

New American Standard Bible — The NASB is a revision of the ASV and KJV. "In 1959 a new translation project was launched, based on the time-honored principles of translation of the ASV and KJV. The result is the New American Standard Bible."

English Standard Version — The ESV is a revision of the 1971 Revised Standard Version: "The words and phrases themselves grow out of the Tyndale-King James legacy, and most recently out of the RSV, with the 1971 RSV text providing the starting point for our work"

New International Version — The NIV is a translation: "The New International Version is a completely new translation of the Holy Bible made by over a hundred scholars working directly from the best available Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek texts."

New English Translation — The NET is also a translation: "The NET Bible is a completely new translation of the Bible with 60,932 translators' notes! It was completed by more than 25 scholars - experts in the original Biblical languages - who worked directly from the best currently available Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts."

### **Question 2: What Original Language Manuscripts were used in the translation?**

When the King James Version was created in 1611, the translators developed the English New Testament using a compilation of Greek texts from the Byzantine family of manuscripts that had been put together by Erasmus, a Dutch scholar. Erasmus' compilation, known as *Textus Receptus*, was the best available at the time, however it was based on just six manuscripts, none of which was earlier than the tenth century.<sup>11</sup> Of the six manuscripts that Erasmus was able to use, only one of them had the Gospels and only one had part of Revelation (the missing part of Revelation was translated from Latin instead).<sup>12</sup>

In the 400 years since the publication of the King James Version, an abundance of additional source manuscripts have been discovered, some of which predate

Erasmus' texts by hundreds of years. Today, the New Testament is preserved in far more manuscripts than any other book from antiquity. Now there are thousands of original language texts, many manuscripts of translation into Syriac, Egyptian and other ancient languages, and even New Testament quotations from early writings and letters. Modern Bibles, beginning with the Revised Version and Diaglott in the late 1800s have benefited from these discoveries. Translations introduced after 1979 use a compilation of texts known as the Nestle/Aland which makes use of 588 handwritten copies of the Greek New Testament, including all known manuscripts dating earlier than the 6th century.<sup>13</sup>

Not all documents are equally reliable, and since we no longer have the original texts (so called "autographs") and instead rely on manuscript copies, it is necessary to evaluate the sources. Textual scholars refer to this process as Textual Criticism and its goal is to determine which ancient manuscripts are nearest to the original autographs. In general, older manuscripts are preferred and consequently some verses which are absent in earlier manuscripts are omitted from Modern Bibles and are instead relegated to footnotes. This is sometimes reassuring when, for example, the Modern Versions remove the erroneous "Comma Johanneum" from 1John 5:7-8 as seen in the KJV (the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one). At other times some find it disconcerting, for example, when modern version like the ESV has a significantly shorter version of the Lord's Prayer recorded in Luke than when compared to Matthew.

### **Question 3: What is the Translation Style and Methodology?**

The goal of all Bible translations is to convey the meaning of the ancient texts as accurately as possible. Realize that professional lexicographers, translators, and commentators know more about the Bible and its original languages than even most ardent Bible students. Translators want the modern reader to come away with the same understanding of God's message as the original hearers. Still, they don't always get it right. There are a number of challenges to this objective which result in the differences between Bible translations. As we have seen, these variances are sometimes based on different source texts. Other challenges facing the translators include:

- 1) Hebrew and Greek words and phrases don't always correspond precisely to English.
- 2) Sometimes words can have a wide range of meanings depending on the context. For example, the English word "trunk" can mean the front of an elephant, the back of a car, or the bottom of a tree.<sup>14</sup>
- 3) Phrases can sometimes carry idiomatic rather than literal meanings. We are familiar with English "Figures of Speech" (e.g., "she laughed her head off", "he changed his mind", etc.). Ancient Hebrew and Greek had similar idiomatic expressions which are often translated figuratively.
- 4) Some ancient words are little used and therefore difficult to interpret. Modern versions have sometimes benefited from archaeological and linguistic discoveries which make the meaning of these words clearer.

One of the most helpful developments in understanding the variances between Bible translations can be found in the extensive translator notes in the NET Bible. From the preface: “The translators and editors used the notes to show major interpretive options and/or textual options for difficult or disputed passages, so that the user knows at a glance what the alternatives are”.

Other variances between English translations can be attributed to the translation approach used by the translators. There are two basic translation styles: literal and dynamic equivalence.

**The literal translation style** uses a word-for-word approach and is concerned with keeping as closely as possible to the words and sentence structure of the original Hebrew and Greek. Because no two languages use words and grammar in exactly the same way, it is a practical impossibility to have a same word-for-same word translation. The Diaglott and Young’s Literal are probably the closest, but these are extremely difficult to read and are best used for study purposes. The New American Standard (NASB) advertises itself as a translation using the literal approach. “Ultimately, what separates the New American Standard Bible from the various available versions is that the NASB is a literal word-for-word translation from the original languages. In contrast, the others . . . place the highest priority on ease of reading and a lower priority on word-for-word preciseness.”

**The Dynamic Equivalence style** is more concerned with keeping the idiom and general meaning of the original by translating on a thought-for-thought basis. Some translations are freer with this approach than others. At one end of the dynamic equivalence spectrum is the King James Bible and at the other end is the New Living Translation. The NIV is said to be somewhere in the middle. Here is what the publishers of the NIV said about dynamic equivalence in the preface to the 2011 version. “The first concern of the translators has continued to be the accuracy of the translation and its faithfulness to the intended meaning of the Biblical writers. This has moved the translators to go beyond a formal word-for-word rendering of the original texts. Because thought patterns and syntax differ from language to language, accurate communication of the meaning of the Biblical authors demands constant regard for varied contextual uses of words and idioms and for frequent modifications in sentence structures”.

The preface to the King James offers similar thoughts about its use of the dynamic equivalence style. “We have not tied ourselves to an uniformity of phrasing, or to an identity of words, as some peradventure would wish we had done.” One well known example of the KJV’s thought-for-thought approach is found in the phrase, “God forbid”. The original literally reads, “certainly not”, but the KJV translated the phrase using a figure of speech familiar to those in the 16th century.<sup>15</sup>

#### **Question 4: Is this a translation or a paraphrase?**

Paraphrase Bibles typically do not translate specific words, phrases, or the grammatical construction from Hebrew and Greek. Instead, a paraphrase Bible attempts to improve clarity by rewording passages to capture what the translator believes is the essence of the passage. The Message is an increasingly popular

paraphrase written by Eugene Patterson. The publisher states, “The goal of The Message is to engage people in the reading process and help them understand what they read. This is not a study Bible, but rather a reading Bible.” As with all paraphrase Bibles, caution should be exercised. While a paraphrase might make a particularly difficult to understand passage make perfect sense, they sometimes accomplish that at the expense of accuracy.

### **Question 5: How is the translation formatted?**

Different Bibles use different formats and this is largely a matter of personal preference. Some Bibles are written in paragraph form while others are in a verse-by-verse format. Some have extensive center column references while others do not. Pay attention to how the Bible identifies quotes from the Old Testament. Is it easy to see that the New Testament writer is quoting from the Old? Many modern versions format Biblical poetry as poetry, not prose. Some versions will include section headings that provide more detail than can be found in chapter headings alone.

### **Question 6: Are Complimentary Study aids available?**

Years ago there were few complimentary study tools for anything but the King James Version. Exhaustive concordances like Strong’s were based on the KJV and this posed a difficulty for those using other translations. Advances in information technology have eliminated this concern. Free online multi-version concordances are easily accessible at sites like biblehub.com and blueletterbible.org. More robust online tools like Logos Bible software are available starting around US\$250. While expensive, software is more cost effective than purchasing hard copies of all the tools available on Logos 6,<sup>16</sup> for example. If you prefer holding a book, start with good Hebrew and Greek Lexicons for understanding the definition and meaning of the original.<sup>17</sup> Modern lexicons are far superior to Strong’s very limited definitions. Additionally, a reverse interlinear can be particularly helpful. A reverse interlinear features the English phrasing as the top-line entry with the original language text beneath it. It makes it practical to use as an everyday Bible since the English lines of text are clear, readable and lucid. In contrast, a conventional interlinear provides the sentence structure of the original language on top with the English written below in an order that is not easy to read.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

Sometimes controversies over Bible translations have arisen in our community. This need not be, especially when we recognize that all versions are imperfect in one way or another. The reality is that God’s saving truth can be discovered no matter which translation is used.

For those of us with a long history of using the King James Bible, it is important to acknowledge that some people find this version difficult to use and understand. If it is our desire to help our congregations, families and friends come to a better understanding of the Gospel, we should recognize and welcome modern versions which may prove to increase their comprehension of God’s Word. Similarly, for those of us who use modern versions, it is important that we empathize with

those who have used the KJV all their lives. Many a brother and sister have memorized parts of the King James and take comfort at the familiar phrasing of favorite passages.

When Israel returned to Jerusalem after their captivity in Babylon, Ezra and the Levites gathered the people by in the city square so they could hear the Book of the Law read aloud. Scripture says, “*They read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading*” (Neh 8:8, NASB). We should give thanks to God that we live in an age and in countries where God’s Book is available for us to read freely, and in our own language. Let us make the most of this opportunity.

Steve Davis (Boston, MA)

**Notes:**

1. Aramiac is only used in about 250 verses in Daniel and Ezra.
2. *Heresy and Authority in Medieval Europe*, Edited with an introduction by Edward Peters, citing S. R. Maitland, *Facts and Documents [illustrative of the history, doctrine and rites, of the ancient Albigenses & Waldenses]*, London, Rivington, 1832, pp. 192-194.
3. *The Book We Call the Bible*, By J. R. Ensey, Advance Ministries.
4. *The Christadelphian Magazine*, volume 18 (1881) Brother Thirtle (pages 289-302).
5. Benjamin Wilson, ‘*Emphatic Diaglott*’.
6. Brother Mark Olsen, What Translation should we use? Companion Notes, February 2008. (To be found on the Internet).
7. The Birmingham Amended Statement of Faith (BASF).
8. e.g., Acts 15:17, Rom 9:33, Heb 1:6.
9. “The translation of the Seventy ([LXX] dissenteth from the Original in many places...It is certain, that that [Septuagint] was not so sound and so perfect, but it needed in many places correction; and who had been so sufficient for this work as the Apostles or Apostolic men? Yet it seemed good to the holy Ghost and to them, to take that which they found...” The Translators o the Reader, Preface to the KJV 1611.
10. Benjamin Wilson, ‘*Emphatic Diaglott*’.
11. Ibid
12. Ibid
13. The current edition (in 2015) is the 28th edition: first published in 1898 by Eberhard Nestle.
14. *Many Versions?* by Sakae Kubo and Walter F. Specht (Zondervan, 1983).
15. Brother Mark Olsen, What Translation should we use? Companion Notes, February 2008. (To be found on the Internet).
16. <https://www.logos.com/basepackages>.
17. <http://www.logosbiblesoftwaretraining.com/videos/reverse-interlinears/>.

*Translation is hard. It involves two steps:*

*Understanding the meaning of the original text in its original historical context (i.e., What did the Hebrew or the Greek mean when it was written for the original audience?), and*

*Making sometimes difficult or impossible choices on how best to represent that meaning in the target language suitable for a modern audience (i.e., How should this meaning be expressed in English for today’s readers?).*

*Neither of these steps is easy. We should be thankful that there are scholars who have dedicated themselves to these endeavors. (Joe Hill)*

## Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

### Put your Trust in His Word

#### A special Book

Several years ago a movie came out called “The Neverending Story”. It was about a young boy named Bastian who wanders into a store one day and gets talking to the owner about a book that the owner is reading. He is told that this book is not like other books. He’s told that this book is special, but when Bastian presses him to explain why, he tells him only that it’s not ‘safe’ like all other stories he might read. Eventually, Bastian’s curiosity gets the better of him and he steals the book and starts to read it. For a while the book is no different than any other. It’s exciting and interesting but no less ‘safe’ than others. But as he reads along he starts to realize that there’s something strange going on. What he discovers is that he is actually one of the characters in the story. The book isn’t just speaking to him, it’s speaking about him. That’s the part that isn’t ‘safe’. What do we do when we realize that you can’t escape the story simply by closing the book?

#### The power of the Word of God

This is an analogy that can also be used to explain the power of the Word of God. The Bible is not like any other book because it doesn’t just speak to us, it speaks about us, and it speaks in such powerful ways that the truly curious have to read on. Consider the words of the writer to the Hebrews,

*“the Word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb 4:12).*

The power of this Word is so penetrating that it divides soul and spirit and is a discerner of the very thoughts and intents of your heart. It is not a ‘safe’ book! Now, consider how complete the Word of God is. Paul says that:

*“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2Tim 3:16-17).*

All Scripture is given by God, the creator and sustainer of the Universe, and all of it is profitable. There is no other book so complete that every word has meaning.

Christadelphians have a very unique perspective on the Word of God because we believe it is the lifeline of faith. The Bible alone is the source of all truth and God has revealed His truth so that the believer can see the plan and purpose of God and conform to His will. Put another way, the Bible is not one of the foods that feeds faith, it is the food of faith, as Paul writes to the Romans “Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God” (Rom 10:17).

Consider the manna in the wilderness. The children of Israel didn't subsist for 40 years on a variety of foods including manna; they lived on one food alone, manna. An alert Bible student will quickly discover that manna is representative of the Word of God which came down like bread from heaven. We ought not, therefore, to pick and choose what to eat from the Word of God. We must recognize and accept that all Scripture is from God, that it is all part of the one food, and as a result, we are blessed to be able to see wonderful harmonies throughout, that help feed our faith and renew our spirit day by day.

### **The Word of God is Truth**

In the same vein we should appreciate that approaching the Word of God from a critical or 'prove it to me' perspective can be as unhelpful as picking and choosing what parts of His word we want to believe. The Word of God does not set out to prove itself in the same way a mathematical proof would. It doesn't start out with a hypothesis and then lay out a set of 'proofs' to verify what it's suggesting is accurate. Instead, it simply puts forth truth from the source of truth, the LORD God Almighty.

Consider the opening words of the Bible: *"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth"* (Gen 1:1). There is no explanation of where God came from or what His thought process was in deciding to create the heaven and the earth. He simply spoke and it came into being. Yet man has spent endless hours and money trying to figure out how He did it or even *if* He did it. At best the word of God today is seen as a 'possible' truth; at worst it's completely thrown out as fiction.

We understand His word is truth and not just a version of the truth, in the same way we understand the bread of life is not just some type of bread. In speaking of both the power and completeness of this book, the Apostle John put it this way:

*"I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book"* (Rev 22:18-19).

That doesn't mean we shouldn't have a discerning eye; in fact the Lord commends those who do. Paul commends the Bereans by saying:

*"These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so"* (Acts 17:11).

The Bereans were commended by Paul because they *'searched the scriptures'* to determine if what he was claiming was true. They turned to the Word of God for truth.

Truth can be found in the Word of God, but for those who believe the Word of God it is much more: It is power. Paul expresses this idea as: *"I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that*

believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, *The just shall live by faith*" (Rom 1:16-17). 'From faith' means that God is faithful. His word is truth and can be trusted. 'To faith' speaks of those who approach His Word believing in its truth. Only to those who do so will the truth of God's word reveal itself and transform the individual, as it says *'The just shall live by faith'*.

### **Unto this day**

If we approach the Word of God with the humility of faith, we will find that any and every part of Scripture will offer to us marvelous revelations about God's truth. Consider again Paul words: *"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works"* (2Tim 3:16-17). Often, we will discover that what seems like the most insignificant word or phrase will be pregnant with meaning, because its very placement has been guided by the hand of God.

One example is the obscure phrase found throughout Scripture, 'unto this day'. This expression is found 89 times in the King James Version of the Scriptures, yet it often has the appearance of being a complete throw away expression; but we know that there are no throw away phrases in the Word of God!

In 2nd Kings it is expressed this way *"So these nations feared the LORD, and served their graven images, both their children, and their children's children: as did their fathers, so do they unto this day"* (2Kgs 17:41).

Unto what day? Presumably the author of 2nd Kings was saying that these nations were worshipping in this manner unto the day that he wrote this passage. What day would that be then? You'd need to be an exceptional Bible historian to even get within a stone's throw of when that day might have been. So how is this profitable information for us?

What the author of 2nd Kings is talking about is the formation of the people who became known as the Samaritans. At this time in 2nd Kings the Assyrians came down and conquered the northern kingdom of Israel, so the Israelites were removed and the Assyrians brought in the people of five other conquered nations into the land. But, we are told that these new peoples didn't fear the LORD, *"therefore the LORD sent lions among them, which slew some of them"* (2Kgs 17:25). In response, they sent a message back to the king of Assyria who sent back one of the priests of Israel to teach them how to worship the God of that land:

*"Howbeit every nation made gods of their own, and put them in the houses of the high places which the Samaritans had made, every nation in their cities wherein they dwelt... So these nations feared the LORD, and served their graven images, both their children, and their children's children: as did their fathers, so do they unto this day."* (2 Kgs 17:29, 41)

The phrase 'both their children, and their children's children' is a biblical phrase that means that each and every succeeding generation continued in that same practice 'unto this day'. Again, unto what day?

This is actually speaking of a very specific day, a day the one who wrote this passage would have no real understanding about. The only way the true meaning of this phrase comes alive is when the overseeing hand of God provides the fulfillment!

### **The fulfillment**

We find this fulfillment in the New Testament when it says of Jesus that *“He must needs go through Samaria”* (John 4:4). Remember what we were told in 2nd Kings about the people the Assyrians brought into this area. It says they brought in people from five other nations and that ‘every nation made gods of their own.’ It then tells us that they feared the LORD and served their graven images from that day forward. So, you had a mixed religion. You had the gods of these five nations trying to fit together with the one God of Israel.

Now, consider John 4. First of all it tells us that Jesus ‘had’ to go through Samaria — why? We know that Jesus was headed from Judea to Galilee, and we know that Samaria lies directly between the two, but we also know that, despite that fact, the Jews regularly went around Samaria when traveling because they hated the Samaritans. Maybe Jesus and his disciples were in a hurry and didn’t have time to go all the way across the Jordan and up through the area of Decapolis? We know that can’t be true because John 4:40 tells us that Jesus stayed there an extra two days at the behest of the Samaritans.

So, why did he “have” to go through Samaria? Because God told him to in the passage in 2nd Kings.

When Jesus arrives in Samaria he meets a woman of Samaria and he asks her for a drink of water. She’s shocked because she knows that Jews and Samaritans don’t talk to each other. But Jesus doesn’t care about such prejudices; instead, he starts to talk to her about the living water that he could provide to her, a water that can spring up ‘into everlasting life.’ She says *“Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw”* (John 4:15). Jesus then tells her to go get her husband. When she says that she has no husband Jesus says *“Thou hast well said, I have no husband: For thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband: in that saidst thou truly”* (John 4:17-18).

How does Jesus know that she has had five husbands and the man she’s with is not her husband? Because she is ‘the woman of Samaria,’ she represents the Samaria that was formed back in 2nd Kings. That Samaria was made up of five polytheistic religions all married together and one monotheistic religion that could never be married to the others. The Samaritans had all practiced that same religion throughout every generation and as ‘the woman of Samaria’ her life with her five husbands and the one now who is not her husband reflected that false religion ‘unto this day.’

But, on this day Jesus spoke to her about *“the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth”* (John 4:23-24). And she went back to the others and told them to come meet a man *“who told me all things that I ever did.”* Then they came and

listened to Jesus and believed on him as well saying, “*Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world*” (John 4:42).

So, for at least one generation of Samaritans, they did not continue to “*fear the LORD and serve their graven images, both their children, and their children’s children: as did their fathers*” (2Kgs 17:41). Instead, they believed on Jesus because “*the Father seeketh such to worship him*” (John 4:23).

When the disciples came back and urged Jesus to eat, he said “*I have meat to eat that ye know not of.*” Neither the disciples nor the author of 2nd Kings would have known about this day because it was ‘meat to eat [they] knew not of’. And what did he understand? “*My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work*” (John 4:34). That’s why ‘had’ to go through Samaria, because the Father had sent Him as part of his great work to take out a people for his name.

We see then that when we approach the word of God ‘from faith to faith’, we can discover things that bring to life the power of transforming spirit of the LORD. You can play it safe and leave this book closed, or you can open it and let it reveal to you things that divide asunder soul and spirit, and joints and marrow, and discern the thoughts and intents of your heart, because the Father seeks such to worship him. Are you curious?

*Jim Sullivan (Boston, MA)*

## **Reflections on Inspiration**

### **The intertwined Bible**

Although the Bible consists of many parts, these parts are all very closely linked together. Thus Exodus continues the story begun in Genesis, and assumes that we have read and accepted Genesis. Leviticus and the first part of Numbers fill in some detail, while the remainder of Numbers and Deuteronomy carry on the narrative. Thus we are led to the books of the kings of Israel and Judah. These books make reference to certain prophets who spoke to the people; and later, in the books of the prophets, we read messages which in turn refer back to the kings. We observe too that the prophetic books frequently quote each other in a manner which shows perfect agreement. It is significant that the last of the Old Testament prophets, Malachi, exhorts the people to remember the Law of Moses, God’s servant. The “Law and the Prophets” are bound together.

The same sort of agreement between its component books is seen in the New Testament. The gospel writers describe the same Lord Jesus Christ. To a large extent they cover the same ground, relating the same discourses, describing the same miracles, recounting the same parables. But there are differences of approach and emphasis, and details omitted by one gospel writer are supplied by another; and together they give us as complete a picture as we need to have of the Lord’s mission. The Acts of the Apostles takes the story of the beginnings of Christianity further. We read of the birth of Christian communities. The work begins in Jerusalem, then extends to Judea and Samaria and thence to the “uttermost parts of the earth”.

Very understandably the apostles would want to communicate with these infant ecclesias, and we are not surprised to find a further section of the New Testament consisting of letters, written by the apostles, to these communities and to some of their elders.

We are impressed also by the links which bind Old and New Testaments together. The New Testament contains hundreds of quotations and references to the Old Testament. These in turn make it clear that the New Testament writers accepted the Old Testament, and regarded themselves as God's servants, appointed to carry on the work commenced by the prophets. Indeed the New Testament contains a number of explicit statements concerning the divinity, the infallibility and the authority of "the Scriptures", both the Old and the New Testaments.

### **The recognition of authority and inspiration**

As we have seen, the Old Testament is simply the word of God as accepted and acknowledged by Jesus and all the nation of Israel at the time of Jesus. And we have argued quite cogently, we believe, is that when various so called "authorities" discussed which of the New Testament books as we have them deserved to be regarded as the Word of God, that they were simply recognizing the reality of the way the inspiration of these books shone through their words, as they were circulated and spread throughout the growing ecclesias.

As Bro. Steve Davis has discussed, for the vast majority who cannot read Hebrew or Greek, we have access to a large number of different translations, differing in their target audience, utility for study for different purposes and ease of understanding, but all providing the same essential message echoing down through the millennia. Not only that, but the vast collection of information available to all Bible students, such as via the Internet enables all who so desire to study the text, letting all dive as deep as they want to into both the original languages and the context of any passage. So our community can readily confirm our one-time reputation as a people of the Bible. It is our hope that this can become a true reality.

### **Prophecy, history and the Bible**

One of the main demonstration of the inspiration of the Bible is the way the prophets, under the inspiration and guidance of God, so accurately described events still future for them, but now revealed to us. But, in addition, the writers of the various books recorded history in ways that no human would normally do. To quote Robert Roberts:

"Man could not be trusted to write divine history. The written history of God's work is the principal part of the work of God in a day like ours. It is the principal illustration of His mind and will. In the writing of such a history man would leave out that which was divinely essential — the record of man's continual failures and sins — whoever might happen to be affected; and he would insert that which was immaterial — the mere political gossip of the age, tending either to human exaltation or depreciation according to the prejudices of the moment. And in all cases, he would be liable to err in his representations, and, therefore, could not

be trusted to give us a writing on which the children of God could rely. Things might be ‘infallibly true’ in themselves, as it is inaptly phrased; but the record of them for divine purposes is an affair of correct knowledge, divine discrimination as to what is important, and unsparing fidelity in the record of the things selected. All these things required inspiration. The things might be known in the mass without inspiration; but only inspiration could assort and select for divine ends. It is a question of the divine use of human materials, and for this divine guidance was necessary.”<sup>21</sup>

The very way history is recorded, human failings as well as triumphs, serves to demonstrate the veracity and truth of the Bible. You simply have to read the records of kings in secular ancient writings to realize how the Bible rings so true: Who would dream of recording the failing of a man like King David, when his very name was so praised at the time as well as by succeeding generations? And the way wise King Solomon is criticized so roundly for his failings, but whose inspired writings have been recorded for us in the Proverbs?

So we have looked at some prophecies: concerning Israel, concerning the nations of the image of Daniel 2, of the way the life and work of Jesus was conveyed long before his birth. So indeed *“We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit”* (2Pet 1:19-21).

We have considered how Egyptian records illustrate the life of Moses, and how supposed problems with the archeological record of Egypt can be so easily reconciled with the Bible.

And we have only scratched the surface of the enormous amount of material available to those interested in the way the inspiration of the Bible can so easily be demonstrated. A few items worthy of referring to in this context are included at the end of this issue

## Conclusion

Paul gives us assurance, through inspiration, that *“all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works”* (2Tim 3:16). We know that here Paul is referring to the Old Testament, but we recognize even in the New Testament his words were regarded as inspired, as Peter wrote *“our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction”* (2Pet 3:15-16). So we see that the New Testament, equally with the Old, should be treated in its totality as the inspired word of God. And so most of us have read it, time and again, and comprehended the truth of the words, ideas,

instructions, and above all the account of the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus contained therein.

However, we must recognize that ultimately it is only intimate personal experience with the unique qualities of the Bible, when it is approached reverently, that can bring that depth of conviction of its divine origin which can withstand all the assaults of the enemy. Such experience is a demonstration in itself that the Word of God is indeed, quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Having had such experience, a man can truly say with the Psalmist “*Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path*” (*Psa 119:105*). Let us honor the Bible then for what it is, the inspired Word of God, and allow its light to guide us to His kingdom.

Peter Hemingray

Notes:

1. Robert Roberts, *Is the Bible the Work of Inspiration?*, p. 9.

## Further Reading

### Books etc.

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- C.C. Walker, *The Word of God: some reasons for believing the Bible to be “The Word of God.”* (Birmingham, *The Christadelphian*, 1926).
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- P. Watkins, “The inspired Scriptures — our sure foundation”, *The Christadelphian*, 1961, pp. 212-214, 243-246, 296-299, 346-349, 405-407, 448-451, 488-491, 532-535.
- A.H. Nicholls, “By inspiration of God”, *The Christadelphian*, 1968, pp. 357- 361.