

# Theology Matters

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## The Trustworthiness of Scripture

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### The Bible--Not Just Another Book

Most of us have heard of the “Wonders of the World,” including the pyramids of Egypt, the hanging gardens of Babylon, and so on. There are also “wonders” of the Bible, characteristics that set the Bible apart from all other literature, ancient and modern. Let’s look at ten of these “wonders of the Bible.”

### The Wonder of Its Unity

One amazing characteristic of the Bible is its unity. The Bible is composed of sixty-six books, thirty-nine in the Old Testament and twenty-seven in the New. Yet those sixty-six books form a cohesive whole, one dynamic message of God’s dealings with humankind.

Probably the first books written were what we know as the Books of Moses or the Law (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy), composed around 1400 B.C. (This assumes an archaeological dating of 1445 B.C. for the exodus. Others cite 1290 B.C.) The last of the New Testament was written around A.D. 90, and includes the writings of the apostle John (the Gospel of John, 1, 2, and 3 John, and Revelation). Genesis through Revelation involves a time span of around fifteen hundred years.

These sixty-six books were composed by more than forty authors, from a variety of educational and cultural backgrounds. Joshua was a general; Daniel was a prime minister; Nehemiah was a court servant; Amos was a shepherd; Luke, a physician; Paul, a rabbi; and Peter and John were fishermen.

The books of the Bible were composed in a variety of places and cultures. Ezekiel wrote his work while a captive in Babylon. Paul wrote some of his letters from prison in Rome. David wrote some of his psalms while he was a fugitive in the wilderness. Jeremiah wrote while he was in a dungeon. The books were written on three continents: Africa, Asia, and Europe.

The Bible was composed in three languages. The Old Testament was written mostly in Hebrew, with a small part in Aramaic. The New Testament was in the *common* Greek of the day, *Koine*.

The Bible deals consistently with such subjects as the origin of the universe, the existence and nature of God, the nature and purpose of humankind, and the origin and extent of evil.

One would expect that the result of such diversity would be a chaotic text, full of contradictions and distortions. But the Bible is consistent, coherent, and trustworthy. None of the authors or books is either internally, of themselves, or externally contradictory.

The unity of the teachings of the Bible is consistent from the beginning to the end. These teachings include the following:

- man—his origin, fall, redemption, earthly and eternal destiny
- sin—its beginning, consequences, punishment in this world and the next
- Satan—the instigator of evil, the liar and murderer from the beginning, his war against God and against believers, his final judgment

- Israel—her social and political development, idolatry, preservation, and final destiny
- the church—her history, from her establishment to her glorification
- salvation—its provision, according to the divine plan
- repentance, faith, the life of the believer, prayer, the service of God, etc.—subjects for infinitely rewarding study, carrying us through the entire Bible
- the Holy Spirit—present at creation, pronouncing the last prayer of the Bible (Genesis 1:2; Revelation 22:17)
- God—forever the same, in his sovereignty, his eternity, his spirituality, his omnipotence, his uniqueness, his omniscience, his omnipresence, his holiness, his righteousness, and his love
- Jesus Christ—the person par excellence of all the written revelation

### **The Wonder of Its Historical Accuracy**

Another feature that separates the Bible from other ancient literature is its fidelity to historical accuracy. Within the pages of the Bible are countless references to events, people, and places. The science of archaeology and secular historical records have repeatedly confirmed the precision of the references in the various biblical books. The minute attention to detail observed by the biblical writers is unparalleled in any other ancient literature. Nelson Glueck, a famous Jewish archaeologist, observed, “It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a biblical reference.”<sup>1</sup>

### **The Wonder of Its Indestructibility**

The fact that the text of the Bible has survived throughout history is a wonderful testimony to the preserving power of God. The Scriptures have survived time, persecution, and criticism.

The first book of the Bible was composed some thirty-five hundred years ago; the last was completed nearly two thousand years ago. The original manuscripts were all written on perishable materials and have long since disappeared. The thousands of copies we possess, however, accurately represent the originals. Through the science of textual criticism, we can arrive at a very close reproduction of the originals. We will develop this point further...on the reliability of the Old and New Testaments.

The Bible has also survived the persecution of its adherents. Consider the following examples of the tenacity of the followers of the Bible in preserving its text in the midst of persecution.

Voltaire, the noted French infidel who died in 1778, said that in one hundred years from his time Christianity would be swept from existence and passed into history. But what has happened?

Voltaire has passed into history, while the circulation of the Bible continues to increase in almost all parts of the world, carrying blessing wherever it goes. For example, the English Cathedral in Zanzibar is built on the site of the Old Slave Market, and the Communion Table stands on the very spot where the whipping-post once stood! The world abounds with such instances.<sup>2</sup>

There is a historical irony about the Voltaire matter. Fifty years after his death, the Geneva Bible Society used Voltaire’s house and printing press to print hundreds of Bibles. Further, two hundred years after Voltaire’s death, Christianity is still not extinct.

In A.D. 303 the Roman emperor Diocletian wrote an imperial letter ordering the destruction of all churches, the burning of all Scriptures, and the loss of civil liberties by all professing Christians. That did not stop the spread of Christianity or the proclamation of God’s revelation in the Bible. Constantine, the Roman emperor who succeeded Diocletian, converted to Christianity and eventually ordered Eusebius to make fifty copies of the Scriptures, to be produced by the best scribes at government expense.

Time passes, but the Bible remains a dramatic testimony to the keeping power of God for his revelation. Rulers come and go. The Bible remains. Critics come and go. The Bible remains.

### **The Wonders of Its Scientific Accuracy**

One of the wonders of the Bible is its scientific accuracy, even though the Bible is not primarily a scientific book. Whenever the biblical writers touch on scientific matters, their observation about nature, man, history, and society are generally accurate and free of the ancient and unsophisticated scientific inaccuracies of their contemporaries. The mythologies in ancient cultures are missing from the Old and New Testaments. Charles Woodrull Shields observed, “Although scientifically the Hebrews did not make the advances that the Assyrians or Egyptians or Greeks did, nevertheless, the Hebrews were free from the grotesque absurdity that disfigures the astronomy or geology of their contemporaries as found in the sacred books of the east or even in the more artistic mythology of the Greeks.”<sup>3</sup>

There are vast differences between the historically sound accounts of creation found in the Bible and the unscientific, absurd accounts of creation popular at the same time in other cultures.

The Babylonian mythological account of creation is a good example of the views current in the ancient world.

The account below is quoted from a commentary by religions expert John B. Noss:

The present world order was formed after a primeval conflict between the dragons of darkness and chaos, led by the bird-god Zu (or in other accounts by Tiamat) and the gods of light and order, headed by Ninurta, the war-god. But the Babylonian priests rewrote whatever materials they inherited, and they made Marduk both the hero of the struggle against chaos and the creator of the world and of man. Their story began with Apsu, the god of fresh water, and Tiamat, the dragon of the unbounded salt water (chaos). By their intermingling, this pair over a period of years produced the gods, but the youthful gods were so lively and boisterous that Apsu could not rest and resolved to destroy them, against the wish of Tiamat....

But before Apsu could execute his plan, he was destroyed by Ea, who got wind of it, whereupon Tiamat resolved on avenging him. She created monsters to be her allies, and both Anu and Ea fled before her. Not until Marduk, assured by the gods that he would be their chief, came forth to meet her in combat was she halted....

After next subduing the monsters she had arrayed against him, Marduk turned back to Tiamat and split her open like a shellfish into halves. With one half he made the canopy which holds back the waters that are above the heavens; with the other half he formed the covering which lies above the waters under the earth. He constructed stations for the gods in the heavens. With Ea's help he made man from the blood of the god Kingsu, Tiamat's ally and second husband. Seeing what he had done, the delighted gods bestowed on him many titles as their undisputed leader.<sup>4</sup>

This account contrasts sharply with both the scientific evidence regarding creation and with the biblical account, which tells of an all-powerful, eternal Creator who created the heavens and the earth from nothing. The Genesis account of creation, while not a scientific narrative in itself, is harmonious with scientific evidence.

Theologian James Orr observed:

No stronger proof could be afforded of the truth and sublimity of the biblical account of the origin of things than is given by the comparison of the narrative of creation in Genesis 1-2:4, with the mythological cosmogonies and theogonies found in other religions.<sup>5</sup>

As another example of the harmony between science and Scripture, we turn to Noah's ark. The dimensions of

Noah's ark as revealed in the Bible are completely credible when compared to barges and large ocean-going vessels in use in this present century. But the Babylonian account of the flood describes an ark that would be completely unseaworthy and scientifically impossible.

Whenever the Bible touches on areas of science (for example, in discussing creation, the flood, etc.), it does it accurately. No scientific observation in the Bible contradicts known scientific evidence. Understand, however, that the Bible is not written in scientific vocabulary. It is primarily a book about God's relationship with humankind. The language of Scripture is neither scientific nor unscientific, but *nonscientific*. It is the language of everyday communication.

A pitfall should be avoided concerning the Bible and science. The tendency is to accuse the Bible of being unscientific for using nonscientific language. An example often pointed to by critics is the biblical account of the sun "standing still" in the sky during Joshua's long day. The critics failed to take common language conventions into consideration. How many critics hear their local television weather report state, "The rotation of the earth on its axis will move our area out of the path of direct sunlight at 5:45 this evening"? None. The common report is, "Sunset this evening will be at 5:45." The critic places greater restrictions on the language of the Bible than he does on himself and those around him. To do so is untenable and, ultimately, unscientific.

Though the Bible is not a scientific textbook and is not written in scientific language, it is wonderful that in all of its particular observations concerning science, it is accurate, faithful to scientific evidence, and in dramatic contrast to other primitive and mythological religious writings.

### **The Wonder of Its Frankness**

An amazing feature of the Bible is the frankness with which it deals with the frailties of people and even with the shortcomings of its own authors. The Bible paints a realistic portrait of its characters, resisting the temptation to mythologize or perfect them. For example, the book of Genesis reveals that Noah, a great man of God who saved the remnant of humanity from the Great Flood, was once found in a drunken stupor: "Then Noah began farming and planted a vineyard. And he drank of the wine and became drunk, and uncovered himself inside his tent" (Genesis 9:20-21).

We see in 2 Samuel 11 that David, a man who loved God, was an adulterer and murderer. Verses 3-4,14-15 tell us:

”So David sent and inquired about the woman. And one said, “Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?” And David sent messengers and took her, and when she came to him, he lay with her; and when she had purified herself from her uncleanness, she returned to her house.... Now it came about in the morning that David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it by the hand of Uriah. And he had written in the letter, saying, “Place Uriah in the front line of the fiercest battle and withdraw from him, so that he may be struck down and die.”

The Bible does not hide the fact that the apostle Paul argued with his companion, Barnabas:

And after some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us return and visit the brethren in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are.” And Barnabas was desirous of taking John, called Mark, along with them also. But Paul kept insisting that they should not take him along who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. And there arose such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus. (Acts 15:36-39)

The fact that the personalities in the Bible are flawed does not detract from the biblical message: it is the holiness of the Lord God that the Bible proclaims, not the perfection of his followers and prophets. Yet Jesus, the greatest personality revealed in the Bible, the one of whom in some sense the whole Bible speaks, is described as being without sin.

### **The Wonder of Its Predictive Prophecy**

One of the most incredible features of the Bible is its prophecies. In no other book do we find the wealth of prophecies, clearly made years before their fulfillment, and all accurately fulfilled in history.

The biblical prophet was a spokesman for God to the people. He not only predicted future events in God’s plan, he also exhorted the people according to the directives of the Lord. His task of exhortation, in fact, occupied more of his time and words than did his prophesying of future events. It is with predictive prophecy, however, that we are here concerned.

There are dozens of examples of fulfilled prophecy to which we could point in both the Old Testament and the New. The most important prophecies, some fulfilled and some yet to be fulfilled, concern Jesus Christ, the most important person in the Bible.

One set of Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah has to do with his family line. Those prophecies, given

long before Jesus was born, indicate that his lineage would be through the royal house of Israel. That is something over which Jesus himself could have no control: he could not manipulate the fulfillment of such prophecies in himself. The one coming would come from the line of Abraham: “The Lord appeared to Abraham and said ‘To your seed I will give this land’” (Genesis 12:7). According to the apostle Paul, this “seed” was Christ (Galatians 3:16).

Out of Jacob’s twelve sons the Messiah was to descend from the line of Judah: “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until Shiloh comes, and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples” (Genesis 49:10).

Jesse, of the tribe of Judah, had eight sons; the Bible predicts that the Messiah would come from his son David: “And your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever” (2 Samuel 7:16); “Behold, the days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when I shall raise up for David a righteous Branch; and he will reign as king and act wisely and do justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely; and this is his name by which he will be called, ‘The Lord our righteousness’” (Jer. 23:5-6).

Thirty times in the New Testament Jesus Christ is said to be descended from David. Three of those statements are: “The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham” (Matthew 1:1); “And when he began His ministry, Jesus himself was about thirty years of age, being supposedly the son of Joseph, the son of Eli...the son of Melea, the son of Menna, the son of Mattatha, the son of Nathan, the son of David” (Luke 3:23, 31); and “concerning his Son, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh” (Romans 1:3).

There are several other Old Testament prophecies that were fulfilled in the life of Jesus, prophecies that could not have been manipulated by any human being. For example, it was predicted that he would be born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:22-23), born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2; Matthew 2:5-6), be filled with the Spirit to begin his ministry (Isaiah 11:2; 61:1-2; Luke 4:18-19), be rejected by his own people (Isaiah 53:3; Psalm 69:8; John 1:11), be betrayed by his companion (Judas) for thirty pieces of silver (Psalms 41:9; 55:12-14; Matthew 26:14-16, 21-25), be forsaken by his disciples (Zechariah 13:7; Matthew 26:31, 56), be crucified with malefactors (Isaiah 53:12; Matthew 27:38), be pierced (Psalms 22:16; Zechariah 12:10; Mark 15:25; John 19:34, 37; 20:25-27), be buried with the rich (Isaiah 53:9; Matthew 27:57-60), and be raised from the dead (Psalm 16:10; Matthew 28:2-8). This

abundance of predictive detail was beyond the control of any human being and shows the inspiration of the Scriptures and the Messiahship of Jesus of Nazareth.

### **The Wonder of Its Christ-centeredness**

Another unique and wonderful feature of the Bible is its Christ-centeredness. The Bible, from beginning to end, in both Old and New Testaments, is a testimony to Jesus Christ, the “Son of Man” and the Lord of glory. After the resurrection, Jesus Christ himself explained how the Old Testament Scriptures pointed to him:

O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?” And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures. (Luke 24:25-27)

Even before his death, Jesus Christ pointed out the Christ-centeredness of the Scriptures. When the Jews who continually harassed Jesus challenged his authority, he responded:

You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that bear witness of Me; and you are unwilling to come to Me, that you may have life. (John 5:39-40)

The Old Testament records the preparation for the coming of Christ: “A voice is calling, ‘Clear the way for the Lord in the wilderness; make smooth in the desert a highway for our God’” (Isaiah 40:3). The theme toward which the Old Testament is pointing is the establishment of the kingdom of God through the reign of the Messiah (the Christ). The Old Testament looks forward to his coming and tells us what it will be like.

#### *Genesis*

- Adam is the type of him “who was yet to come” (Romans 5:14)
- the posterity of the woman was to be Christ, who would bruise and crush the head of the serpent (Genesis 3:15)
- the blood of Abel, the righteous man, is compared to the blood shed on the cross (Hebrews 12:24)
- Melchizedek is said to be like unto the Son of God (Genesis 14:18-20; Hebrews 7:1-10)
- Isaac, the son loved of his father, was offered as a sacrifice (Genesis 22)
- Shiloh is the Sovereign from the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:10) *Exodus*
- the Passover Lamb (Exodus 12; John 1:29; 1 Corinthians 5:7)
- the manna, miraculous bread sent down from heaven (Exodus 16; John 6:31-33)
- the smitten rock, which “was Christ” (Exodus 17:1-7; 1 Corinthians 10:4)

#### *Leviticus*

- the bleeding sacrifices, picture of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross (Hebrews 9:12-14; 10:1-4, 11-14)
- the sacrifice of atonement (Leviticus 16:1-35; Hebrews 9:24-25)

#### *Numbers*

- Aaron’s rod, picture of the resurrection of the Lord (Numbers 17:1-11)
- the red heifer, another prefiguration of the purifying sacrifice (Numbers 19; Hebrews 9:13)
- the brazen serpent, representing Christ on the cross (Numbers 21:4-9; John 3:14-16), etc.

Going over to the Psalms, we see further details in the portrayal of the coming Messiah:

- 2: the Anointed One
- 8: the Son of Man and his humiliation
- 16: the Beloved delivered to the place of the dead
- 22: the sufferings on the cross
- 69: the insults and the gall and vinegar
- 72: the King of Peace
- 110: the Lord glorified

Among the prophets, Isaiah has been called the evangelist of the Old Testament because he presents a full picture of the coming Messiah. Isaiah speaks of the Messiah as:

- 7:14: Immanuel, born of a virgin
- 9:6: the Son, the Mighty God, the Prince of Peace
- 11:1-10: the shoot out of the stock of Jesse, the One clothed with the Spirit who “will rest” upon him
- 40:1-10: the God who was to come
- 40:11: the Shepherd of the sheep
- 42:1-4; 49:1-7: the Servant of Jehovah (Yahweh)
- 53: the man of sorrows
- 61:1-2: the Anointed of God, the Emancipator
- 63:1-6: the Judge

The New Testament tells of his first coming and anticipates his second coming. Before his death Jesus Christ described to his disciples the necessity for his death, burial, and resurrection in order to accomplish redemption for the world. But he did not stop there. He also described to them his second coming, with glory, power, and judgment at the end of the age:

For just as the lightning comes from the east, and flashes even to the west, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be.... And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other. (Matthew 24:27,30-31)

The Old Testament records the preparation for the coming of the Messiah. The Gospels record the coming

of the Messiah, Jesus Christ our Lord. The book of Acts records the propagation of the gospel (the good news) concerning Jesus Christ. The Epistles (letters) explain the gospel and its implications for our lives. The book of Revelation anticipates and describes the second coming of Jesus Christ and the establishment of his eternal kingdom. From beginning to end, the Bible glorifies Jesus Christ and centers on him. Its Christ-centeredness is one of its wonderful features.

### **The Wonder of Its Intellectual Integrity**

One of the Bible's most wonderful features is the intellectual integrity it inspires in its readers. Although it was composed between two and four thousand years ago, it still has the power to challenge intelligent men and women to develop their full intellectual capabilities in studying its rich teachings and history. It can stand the test of the most rigorous intellectual assault. Those who have dedicated their lives to understanding and appreciating the Scriptures have not been disappointed.

A contemporary example of a person whose intellectual pursuits were spurred on by his devotion to the Scriptures is the noted Christian scholar E. M. Blaiklock. He writes:

Here are the alternatives. Either four men, only one of them with any education in the liberal sense of the word, invented the Character who altered the whole course of history, or they wrote of One they knew or had heard about from those who knew him, a Person so extraordinary that he could claim deity, sinlessness, all authority, and rouse no revulsion among those who long knew him intimately and experimentally. The religious leaders, collaborators with the occupying power, so feared him that they betrayed and murdered him, and in so doing, like the doomed actors in an Aristotelian tragedy, loosed forces which swept the world.<sup>6</sup>

The Bible tells us we are to love the Lord our God with all our mind (Matthew 22:37). [Contemporary] men and women can use their minds, taking the Bible and evaluating it with full intellectual scrutiny. The Bible will prevail and continue to satisfy and stimulate the intellect of any who fairly investigate its claims.

### **The Wonder of Its Teachings**

Another wonderful aspect of the Bible separates it from all other religious books and is a testimony to its divine origin. This is the wonder of its unique teachings. The teachings in the Bible cannot be explained as a product of the religious environment of its authors, since many of its teachings were contrary to contemporary religious thought and were hard for the Jews themselves to accept. Of many such examples we will discuss a few representative ones.

Much of the unique teaching in the Bible centers around the personal God it reveals. Israel was surrounded by polytheistic cultures (cultures that believed in more than one God). Israel often slipped into idolatry itself. Yet its holy Scriptures, the Old Testament, betray not a word in favor of idolatry. The Old Testament, in fact, is filled with warnings against idolatry. In addition, the Bible repeatedly emphasizes monotheism (belief in one God). Here are two scriptural examples:

Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. (Deuteronomy 6:4-5)

“You are my witnesses,” declares the Lord, “and My servant whom I have chosen, in order that you may know and believe Me, and understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed, and there will be none after Me. I, even I, am the Lord; and there is no savior besides Me.” (Isaiah 43:10-11)

The New Testament continues the absolute monotheism of the Old Testament:

We know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one. For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and we exist through Him. (1 Corinthians 8:4-6)

The nature and attributes of the God of the Bible are also different from the concepts of God in cultures surrounding the Jews. The Bible reveals a God who is infinite and personal, who cares for human beings as a Father and who personifies love, respect, justice, and mercy. This is in contrast to other gods of the ancient world who were to be obeyed and served out of fear rather than from loving respect. An idea of the fatherly attitude of the God of the Bible was revealed by Jesus Christ:

And I say to you, ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it shall be opened. Now suppose one of you fathers is asked by his son for a fish; he will not give him a snake instead of a fish, will he? Or if he is asked for an egg, he will not give him a scorpion, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him? (Luke 11:9-13)

In many other religious settings God is to be obeyed in order for the faithful to receive rewards. In the Bible we

are taught to obey God out of love: “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments” (John 14:15).

A final unique teaching from the Bible is the resurrection of the founder of Christianity, Jesus Christ. This teaching is a wonder, since in no other religious literature do we have a resurrection that was *bodily* and that can be *tested* by the most rigorous historical methods. While many other religious traditions have ideas of spiritual or spirit resurrections (untestable hypotheses), only the Bible proclaims a bodily resurrection that passes all tests of historical reliability.

We conclude that the Bible, in both Old and New Testaments, contains teachings that are unique and wonderful in comparison to the best teachings offered in any other religious or nonreligious writings.

### **The Wonder of Its Life-Transforming Power**

We now come to the last of the ten wonders of the Bible considered here. This wonder is the Bible’s effect on individuals. If the Bible is indeed the Word of God, it should demonstrate its ability to transform lives.

We must first note that the Bible claims that Jesus Christ can fill the spiritual void within all people.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. (Matt. 5:6)

Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My load is light. (Matt. 11:28-30)

Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life. (John 4:14)

I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. (John 10:10)

Christian scholar Harold Lindsell gives this perspective on the life-transforming importance of Christianity as revealed in the Scriptures:

We can trust the Bible [because] it does what it claims it will do: it transforms lives. Millions of people have testified that they have been forgiven and have received the gift of eternal life. Their prayers have been answered; their deepest needs satisfied. Lives have been radically changed. Thieves steal no more, liars become honest, adulterers live holy lives, and covetous people lose their greed. Churches, schools, and hospitals have

risen as proof of the salutary effect the gospel of Jesus Christ has had on multitudes.<sup>7</sup>

Psychiatrist J. T. Fisher put it this way:

If you were to take the total of all authoritative articles ever written by the most qualified of psychologists and psychiatrists on the subject of mental hygiene—if you were to combine them and refine them and cleave out the excess verbiage—if you were to take the whole of the meat and none of the parsley, and if you were to have these unadulterated bits of pure scientific knowledge concisely expressed by the most capable of living poets, you have an awkward and incomplete summation of the Sermon on the Mount. And it would suffer immeasurably through comparison. For nearly two thousand years the Christian world has been holding in its hands the complete answer to its restless and fruitless yearnings.<sup>8</sup>

The wonderful, life-transforming power of the Bible is a fact.

### **Conclusion**

The remarkable credentials of the Bible do not mean that it is true, but they do mean that it deserves serious consideration. Any sincere seeker after truth should look into this book for answers to the ultimate questions of existence.

Now that we have seen that the Bible is not just another book, but a wonderful record of God’s voice to humankind, we will go on to review the making of the Old and New Testaments. We will first delve into questions concerning the reliability of the Hebrew Scriptures. Can we really trust our Old Testament? Is the text we have today truly representative of the original? We will cover these and other interesting features about the making of the Old Testament in the next chapter.

### **The Making of the Old Testament**

Originally, the Hebrew Scriptures consisted of twenty-four books composed between 1400 and 400 B.C. They are placed into three major divisions: the Law (*Torah*), the Prophets (*Nebhiim*), and the Writings (*Kethubim*). They include:

THE LAW (or Pentateuch) Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy

THE PROPHETS

The Former Prophets—Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings

The Latter Prophets—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel  
The Twelve (Hosea—Malachi)

THE WRITINGS: The Poetical Books—Job, Psalms, Proverbs

The Five Rolls—Ruth, Esther, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Lamentations  
The Historical Books—Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, 1 and 2 Chronicles

These twenty-four books are divided further into a total of thirty-nine books—those that form the Old Testament as we know it. To understand how these books reached their present grouping and authority in the Old Testament, we need to look at the history of the text, observing how the various books were preserved and transmitted over the centuries.

### History of the Text

The books of the Old Testament were considered special by the Jews. They were not ordinary literature or ordinary history. They were God’s Word communicated to his people. Because of the high regard for these books, great care was taken to preserve their texts precisely as they were written.

The Pentateuch identifies the priests in Israel as the ones responsible for the preservation of the law. They were to store it beside or in the ark of the covenant, which was placed in the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle and, later, in the temple. The Old Testament records this command: “Take this book of the law and place it beside the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may remain there as a witness against you” (Deuteronomy 31:26).

The kings of Israel were required to have the law before them as a guide in their administration of the kingdom:

Now it shall come about when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself a copy of this law on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests. And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God. (Deuteronomy 17:18-19)

Since the Pentateuch and other writings that make up the Old Testament were considered holy, they were preserved with great care. There is adequate evidence from history that this preservation was consistent and precise.

The *Mishnah* (a codification of the traditional Jewish oral law, committed to writing around A.D. 200) supplies us with an unbroken historical tradition about the people responsible for the preservation of the text from the time of Moses until the Council of Jamnia (first century A.D.).

The Council of Jamnia was very important. It solidified the Jewish canon of inspired books into the form we know as the Old Testament today. Biblical scholar F. F. Bruce commented:

The books which they decided to acknowledge as canonical were already generally accepted, although questions had been raised about them. Those which they refused to admit had never been included. They did not expel from the canon any book which had previously been admitted. “The Council of Jamnia,” as J. S. Wright puts it, “was the confirming of public opinion, not the forming of it.”<sup>9</sup>

From the Mishnah and the tradition since the Council of Jamnia we have documented accounts of the history of the preservation of the Old Testament.

### The Sopherim

From the completion of the Old Testament (400 B.C.) in the time of Ezra until the time of the Jewish scholars known as *Masoretes* (A.D. 500), the transmission and care of the Old Testament text was in the hands of a group of scribes. This group was called the *Sopherim* (meaning “counters”). The scribes got this name because of the manner in which they checked the accuracy of their copying of the texts. The Sopherim counted the number of letters and words in each copy and compared them to the texts from which they copied. This minute accounting was described by biblical and literary scholar Sir Frederic Kenyon:

Besides recording varieties of reading, tradition, or conjecture, the Masoretes undertook a number of calculations which do not enter into the ordinary sphere of textual criticism. They numbered the verses, words, and letters of every book. They calculated the middle word and middle letter of each. They enumerated verses which contained all the letters of the alphabet, or a certain number of them; and so on. These trivialities...had yet the effect of securing minute attention to the precise transmission of the text.... The Masoretes were anxious that not one jot nor tittle, not one smallest letter nor one tiny part of a letter, of the Law should pass away or be lost.<sup>10</sup>

### The Masoretes

The scribes called the Sopherim were entrusted with the preservation and interpretation of the Scriptures. They were specialists in preserving the sacred writings, laws, history and tradition of the Jewish people. A group of such specialists emerged around A.D. 500. They were known as the *Masoretes*, deriving their name from the Hebrew word *Masorah*, meaning “tradition.” The Masoretes did their work in both Palestine and Babylon from approximately A.D. 500 to A.D. 900. They contributed to Old Testament textual preservation in several significant ways.

The Masoretes collected all the textual-critical remarks of the rabbis (Jewish teachers), all the additional marks



added to the margins of the sacred texts (including memory devices, pronunciation aids, etc.), and entered these in the side margins of the copies they made. Another contribution of the Masoretes was their invention of a complete Hebrew vowel system as an aid in pronunciation. Hebrew is traditionally a language only of consonants, without vowels. Because the same combinations of Hebrew consonants could sound different with different vowel sounds, when Hebrew ceased to be predominantly a spoken language, word pronunciation was forgotten. The Masoretes remedied this problem by inventing a system of symbols that were placed near the consonants and yet did not interfere with the consonant text at all. These “vowel points” are still used in printed editions of the Hebrew Old Testament.

The Masoretes also added a system of accent indicators that aided in the public reading of the text and are still a great help in determining where a sentence or clause begins or ends.

The contributions of the Masoretes to the textual preservation of the Old Testament cannot be minimized. Not only did they carefully enhance understanding of the texts by their marginal contributions, they also carefully preserved all of the alternate readings of the texts, a service invaluable to today’s textual critics in their work to determine the original text.

### **Hebrew Manuscripts**

Why are there so few extant (existing) ancient copies of the Old Testament? The reason we do not possess many older copies of the Hebrew Scriptures is because of the reverence with which the Jews protected the purity of God’s Word. The Jews considered the text so sacred that they ceremoniously disposed of worn copies. The worn copies were first stored in a special room in the synagogue, called a *Genizah*. After a number of copies accumulated, they were all buried together (usually in the grave of some Jewish scholar). The Jews believed that this would protect readers from misreading God’s Word because of worn spots in older manuscripts. That practice accounts for our having very few early manuscripts of the Old Testament.

Accuracy was not lost by destroying the worn copies because of the meticulous care with which the Jews copied the manuscripts. The new copy was identical to the worn-out copy in every detail. Because the Jews considered the text so sacred, they refused to change it in any way.

### **Further Testimony to the Text of the Old Testament**

Besides the Hebrew manuscripts already mentioned, we possess further testimonies to the accuracy of our Old

Testament text. Textual critics also consult the Aramaic *Targums*, the Greek *Septuagint*, the *Samaritan Pentateuch*, and the *Dead Sea Scrolls*. Let us now look at the evidence from each of these sources.

#### The Targums

The Targums were Jewish paraphrases of the Old Testament, written mostly in the Aramaic language. The first recorded instance of a Targum is found in the Old Testament itself. When Judah returned from its seventy-year exile in Babylon, many of the people had forgotten Hebrew and now spoke Aramaic. That change made the Hebrew Scriptures incomprehensible to them. Those learned Jews who understood both languages read aloud to the citizens in Hebrew and then gave a paraphrase of the passage in Aramaic. This practice is recorded in Nehemiah 8:8 (“And they read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading”).

That practice continued until the entire Old Testament, except for the passages already in Aramaic in Daniel and Ezra, were given Aramaic paraphrases. The Targums, no matter how practical, were never given the holy authority accorded to the Hebrew originals.

To textual critics, the Targums are helpful in establishing the correct text of the Old Testament. Some Targums date back centuries before the standard Masoretic text. The Targums had a long oral history before they were first recorded. They thus become a very ancient witness to the true text of the Old Testament.

#### The Septuagint

The Septuagint, the standard Greek translation of the Old Testament, was composed to meet the needs of Greek-speaking Jews in Egypt during the Hellenistic period (c. 250 B.C.). This large Jewish community was concentrated in the city of Alexandria. The Jewish leaders there began to translate the Old Testament into Greek around 250 B.C. The standardized Greek text of the whole Old Testament became known as the Septuagint (Greek for “seventy”). The Septuagint is often abbreviated as LXX, the Roman-numeral notation for seventy. According to tradition, the Septuagint was prepared by seventy learned Jews during a seventy-day period, each working separately. The Lord so honored their effort, tradition goes, that when the scholars met, their translations were identical in every respect. However, in reality, the LXX took several centuries to complete, and as a translation it varies in quality. Some parts are faithful renderings of the Hebrew, other parts are less so. In places it seems to diverge from the Masoretic text.

The importance of the LXX is that it is an ancient witness to the text of the Old Testament. Even in those

places where the text differs from the Masoretic text, the percentage of difference is not great, and the differences do not represent significant changes in meaning.

#### The Samaritan Pentateuch

Another source used by textual critics for the text of the Old Testament is the Samaritan Pentateuch. The people who lived in Samaria were a result of interbreeding of Jews and Assyrians. After the Babylonian captivity they cut themselves off entirely from the Jews (about 586 B.C.), and their development was independent from that point on. They possessed their own text of the Bible (only the Pentateuch) and their own temple on Mount Gerizim. The Gospel of John reminds us that Jews had no dealings with Samaritans (John 4:9).

The Samaritans believed that only the Pentateuch (first five books of the Old Testament) was the inspired Word of God. They rejected both the Prophets and the Writings. The oldest manuscripts of the Samaritan Pentateuch still in existence date from the tenth century A.D. The Samaritan Pentateuch, written in a unique script with no vowel signs, differs little from the Masoretic text. What is remarkable is that their close similarity was maintained over a fifteen hundred-year independence from each other.

#### The Dead Sea Scrolls

Until 1947 the oldest complete manuscript of the Old Testament in our possession dated from around A.D. 1000, a full fourteen hundred years after the completion of the Old Testament. Many speculated that during that long span of years significant changes could have crept into the text.

In 1947, however, a dramatic event took place, which laid to rest doubts about the reliability of the Old Testament text. In that year a young Bedouin goat-herder was looking for a lost goat in the caves in the cliffs above Wadi Qumran, near the Dead Sea. In one cave he found several clay jars over two feet high and approximately ten inches wide. Those jars contained leather scrolls wrapped in linen cloth.

One of the first scholars to examine the scrolls was E. L. Sukenik of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, who immediately recognized their antiquity and value. The amazing find was confirmed by W. F. Albright, one of this century's eminent archaeologists. Confirming that the scrolls were of the Old Testament, Albright labeled the find "the most important Old Testament manuscript discovery ever made."

Recovery of more scrolls was halted by Arab-Israeli conflicts, so it was not possible to investigate further until the peace of 1948. Investigation then revealed

hundreds of scrolls or fragments of scrolls in different caves. The scrolls had been placed there by a Jewish sect called the Essenes, who had established a fortress nearby, which they occupied from about 100 B.C. to A.D. 68, when they fled the advancing Roman armies. Before they abandoned their community they carefully hid their library in the nearby caves of Wadi Qumran. There they lay undisturbed for almost nineteen hundred years.

Analysis showed that the scrolls were composed mostly during those years between 100 B.C. and A.D. 68. They contain portions of every book of the Old Testament (except Esther) and numerous documents relating to the doctrines and practices of the Essenes. Particularly significant is the complete scroll of Isaiah, found in Cave 1 and dating to one hundred years before Christ. An important fragment of Samuel, dating four hundred years before Christ, was found in Cave 4. These and other finds revolutionized Old Testament textual criticism.

The Dead Sea Scrolls provide clear evidence of the complete faithfulness of the Old Testament text to the originals in spite of transmission through long centuries. After comparing the entire Isaiah manuscript from Qumran with the present Hebrew text of Isaiah, Old Testament scholar Gleason L. Archer concluded that the Dead Sea Scroll "proved to be word for word identical with our standard Hebrew Bible in more than 95 percent of the text. The 5 percent of variation consisted chiefly of obvious slips of the pen and variations in spelling."<sup>11</sup>

#### **Conclusion**

The evidence in support of the trustworthiness of the Old Testament text is overwhelming. It accurately represents the original. One of the great Old Testament scholars of [the twentieth] century, Robert Dick Wilson, affirmed that the evidence favors the veracity of the Old Testament text. He declared:

In 144 cases of transliteration from Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonian and Moabite into Hebrew and in 40 cases of the opposite, or 184 in all, the evidence shows that for 2,300 to 3,900 years the text of the proper names in the Hebrew Bible has been transmitted with the most minute accuracy. That the original scribes should have written them with such close conformity to correct philological principles is a wonderful proof of their thorough care and scholarship; further, that the Hebrew text should have been transmitted by copyists through so many centuries is a phenomenon unequalled in the history of literature.<sup>12</sup>

So, though the oldest parts of the Old Testament are probably thirty-four hundred years old, we can be

confident that the text we possess today accurately represents what was originally written.

## The Making of the New Testament

The books of the New Testament were written in *Koine* Greek, the most widely spoken language in the first century. As with the Old Testament, we do not possess the originals, or autographs, because of age. That makes us dependent on copies—copies of copies—to construct the text. How good are the copies? Can we be sure the text has not been tampered with?

The discipline that deals with reconstructing texts is known as *textual criticism*. The reason for using textual criticism in New Testament study is twofold: (1) We do not possess the original manuscripts, and (2) the copies we possess differ in some areas. The textual critics, therefore, piece together the evidence to reconstruct the original text. In the case of the New Testament, three lines of evidence are available to reconstruct the original: the Greek manuscripts, early non-Greek versions, and the Church Fathers.

### The Greek Manuscripts

How well have the Greek manuscripts of the New Testament been transmitted?

The problem with almost all ancient writings is the lack of extant (existing) manuscripts to reconstruct the text. Most ancient writings have the most paltry manuscript evidence by which experts attempt to establish the original.

In the case of the New Testament, however, we are not lacking manuscripts to reconstruct the text. On the contrary, we have an abundance of manuscripts.

In the history of the transmission of the Greek text we have found different lines of evidence: papyri, uncial manuscripts, minuscule manuscripts, and lectionaries.

The first line of evidence of the Greek manuscripts is the papyri. Papyrus is the material that the original copies of the New Testament were composed of. It is an extremely perishable material, surviving only in warm, dry climates. The papyrus fragments that have survived, however, contain some of the earliest witnesses to the New Testament text. Of the ninety-six surviving New Testament papyri, about half date earlier than the fourth century. The most significant papyri are the Oxyrhynchus Papyri (about twenty-five manuscripts of New Testament portions), the Chester Beatty Papyri (three early manuscripts—one with the four Gospels and Acts, another with the Pauline Epistles, and one with Revelation), and the Bodmer Papyri (three early manuscripts—one with John, another with 1 and 2 Peter

and Jude, and one with Luke and John). The papyri were written with the uncial script.

Uncial writing, which consisted of uppercase letters (all capitals) that were deliberately and carefully written, is the type of writing used at the time of the composition of the New Testament. The uncial manuscripts were written between the fourth and tenth centuries. Among the most important and reliable uncial manuscripts are Codex Vaticanus (fourth century), Codex Sinaiticus (fourth century), Codex Alexandrinus (fifth century), and Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus (fifth century). In the ninth century, uncial writing began to be replaced with minuscule writing.

Minuscule writing was a script of smaller letters not as carefully executed as uncials; books could be turned out much faster by the employment of minuscule writing. Minuscule writing was in vogue from the ninth to the sixteenth centuries.

Lectionaries were the result of the Christian church following the custom of synagogue. Every Sabbath different portions of the Law and Prophets were read. The church developed a similar practice, reading a different portion of the Gospels and Epistles according to a fixed order of Sundays and holy days. These readings are known as lectionaries. The earliest fragments of lectionaries come from the sixth century A.D. Complete manuscripts are found as early as the eighth century.

We catalogue the surviving Greek manuscripts along the following lines: papyri, uncial manuscripts, minuscule manuscripts, and lectionaries.

<u>Type of Manuscript</u>	<u>Number Surviving</u>
Papyri	96 or 97
Uncial	267
Minuscule	2,764
Lectionaries	2,143
Recent finds not catalogued	47
Total	5,317 or 5,318

The total number of surviving Greek manuscripts upon which the original New Testament text can be reconstructed dwarfs all other ancient works. Yet Greek manuscripts are not the only line of evidence available for this reconstruction.

### Versions

Another line of evidence by which the New Testament text can be established comes from the versions. Versions are translations of the different New Testament books into other languages. Although ancient literature was rarely translated into another language, the New Testament was an exception. From the second

century, Christian missionaries, in an attempt to propagate their faith, translated the New Testament into the various languages of the people they encountered. Some of those translations, made as early as the middle of the second century, give us an important witness to the text of that early time.

When the copies of the manuscripts of the versions are catalogued, we are again faced with an overwhelming number. (It should be noted that when we speak of manuscripts or copies we are referring to any part of a manuscript or copy that has survived. Thus the copies could be anything from a single fragment to a complete text.) The following breakdown illustrates this:

<u>Versions</u>	<u>Number of Manuscripts</u>
Latin Vulgate	10,000+ (may be as high as 25,000)
Ethiopic	2,000+
Slavic	4,101+
Armenian	2,587
Syriac Peshitta	350+
Bohairic	100
Total	19,000+

Since the versions are translations from the Greek, they are not as valuable as the Greek manuscripts in reconstructing the original text. They are, however, an important witness to the text's basic reliability.

### **The Church Fathers**

A third line of evidence can be consulted in establishing the New Testament text, quotations from the writings of men known as the "Church Fathers." In their writings the Church Fathers would often quote from the New Testament text. Every time we find a biblical quotation in their writings, we have another witness to the New Testament text.

For example, Ignatius (A.D. 70-110) wrote seven letters in which he quoted from eighteen different books of the New Testament. Every time he quotes a text, we can observe what Greek text he was using by his quotation. Thus, the early Church Fathers provide us with an excellent early witness to the text.

The number of quotations of the Fathers is overwhelming, so much so that, if every other source for the New Testament (Greek manuscripts, versions) were destroyed, the text could be reconstructed merely on the writings of the Fathers. Consequently, when the evidence from the Greek manuscripts, the versions, and the Church Fathers is considered, any impartial person cannot help but be impressed.

### **Variant Readings**

What is a variant reading? Simply stated, when two manuscripts differ on a particular word or phrase in the text, the result is a variant reading. The difference may be of spelling, word order or different words employed. The variations in the text arose both unintentionally and intentionally.

### **Unintentional Variations**

The greatest number of variants in the New Testament manuscripts were of the unintentional variety. They could creep into the text through faulty sight, hearing, writing, memory, or judgment on the part of the scribe. Bruce Metzger writes:

In the earliest days of the Christian church after an apostolic letter was sent to a congregation or an individual, or after a gospel was written to meet the needs of a particular reading public, copies would be made in order to extend its influence and to enable others to profit from it as well. It was inevitable that such handwritten copies would contain a greater or lesser number of differences in wording from the original. Most of the divergencies arose from quite accidental causes, such as mistaking a letter or a word for another that looked like it. If two neighboring lines of a manuscript began or ended with the same group of letters or if two similar words stood near each other in the same line, it was easy for the eye of the copyist to jump from the first group of letters to the second, and so for a portion of the text to be omitted (called *homeoarchton* [like beginning] or *homoeoteleuton* [like ending], depending upon whether the similarity of letters occurred at the beginning or the ending of the words). Conversely the scribe might go back from the second to the first group and unwittingly copy one or more words twice (called dittography). Letters that were pronounced alike were sometimes confused (called itascism). Such accidental errors are almost unavoidable whenever lengthy passages are copied by hand.<sup>13</sup>

### **Intentional Variations**

Some variations in the text came about intentionally. J. Harold Greenlee writes:

These comprise a significant, although a much less numerous, group of errors than the unintentional changes. They derive for the most part from attempts by scribes to improve the text in various ways. Few indeed are the evidences that heretical or destructive variants have been deliberately introduced into the mss.<sup>14</sup>

Bruce Metzger expands upon the intentional variations: Other divergencies in wording arose from deliberate attempts to smooth out grammatical or stylistic

harshness, or to eliminate real or imagined obscurities of meaning in the text. Sometimes a copyist would add what seemed to him to be a more appropriate word or form, perhaps derived from a parallel passage (called harmonization or assimilation). Thus, during the years immediately following the composition of the several documents that eventually were collected to form the New Testament, hundreds if not thousands of variant readings arose.<sup>15</sup>

It is often charged by those opposed to Christianity that the variant readings in the manuscripts undermine the reliability of the text. These people point to some two hundred thousand variants in the existing manuscripts, so it is impossible to recover the New Testament's exact text. Nothing could be further from the truth because we have so many early, reliable manuscripts that have enabled textual scholars to make great advances in recovering the original wording of the New Testament.

The great scholar Samuel Tregelles stated, "We possess so many mss, and we are aided by so many versions, that we are never left to the need to conjecture as the means of removing errata."<sup>16</sup>

### Summary and Conclusions

Although we do not possess the original manuscripts of any of the books of the New Testament, the evidence that it has been transcribed accurately through history is overwhelming. We conclude that the New Testament has been transcribed accurately throughout history. Any contrary conclusion is based either on ignorance of the evidence or on a willful desire not to accept the facts. The late Sir Frederic Kenyon, director of the British Museum, was a respected authority on ancient manuscripts. After a lifetime of studying ancient documents he came to the following conclusions:

The text of the Bible is certain; especially is this the case with the New Testament. The number of manuscripts of the New Testament, of early translations from it, and of quotations from it in the oldest writers of the church, is so large that it is practically certain that the true reading of every doubtful passage is preserved in some one or other of these ancient authorities. This can be said of no other ancient book.<sup>17</sup>

### The Bible and Inspiration

We have seen that the books of the Bible have been transmitted accurately and are reliable witnesses to the events they portray. Now two questions will be addressed: Are the books of the Bible more than reliable historical literature? Are the books of the Bible the Word of God?

### The Nature of Inspiration: Four Perspectives

One can view the Bible and its inspiration from several different perspectives. We will take a brief look at four of those perspectives before we produce a workable definition of the nature of biblical inspiration.

**1. The Bible is an inspiring book but no different from other great literary works of the past.** This view places the Scriptures on the same level as other human productions. It denies the possibility of God's providing a revelation of himself through the books of the Bible.

**2. The Bible is "in part" the Word of God.** This view limits the manner and quantity in which a revelation of God can be contained in the books of the Bible. Proponents of this view say, "The Bible *contains* the Word of God," or "The Bible *becomes* the Word of God."

The idea that the Bible *contains* the Word of God makes the individual reader the final determiner of inspiration. How is one to determine which parts of the Bible are part of God's revelation and which parts are of only human origin? When the individual, or even a community of individuals (as in a church), becomes the determiner of inspiration, he becomes entangled in his own system. He has no adequate way of discerning whether the inspiration is inherent in certain parts of Scripture (and thus recognizable in some way by him), or perhaps he determines what is inspired, making biblical inspiration subjective rather than inherent.

**3. The Bible is the divine Word of God dictated by God to selected human authors.** This view leaves no room for the personal diversities of the various individual writers, diversities clearly evident in the Bible. Although it is popular among liberals and nonreligious persons to accuse all serious or conservative Christians (evangelicals) of holding this position, it is actually not a tenable position. Dr. James I. Packer notes:

This "dictation theory" is a man of straw. It is safe to say that no Protestant theologian, from the Reformation till now, has ever held it; and certainly modern Evangelicals do not hold it.... It is true that many sixteenth and seventeenth-century theologians spoke of Scripture as "dictated by the Holy Ghost." But all they meant was that the authors wrote word for word what God intended.... The use of the term "dictation" was always figurative.... The proof of this lies in the fact that, when these theologians addressed themselves to the question, What was the Spirit's mode of operating in the writers' minds? they all gave their answer in terms not of dictation, but of accommodation, and rightly maintained that God completely adapted his inspiring activity to the

cast of mind, outlook, temperament, interests, literary habits, and stylistic idiosyncrasies of each writer.<sup>18</sup>

#### **4. The Bible is a book that is both divine and human.**

In expanded form, this view reflects the biblical teaching that the Bible itself, in all that it states, is a product of divine revelation, channeled through, but not corrupted by, human agency, by which the unique talents, backgrounds, and perspectives of the authors complement rather than restrict what God intended to reveal.

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness. (2 Timothy 3:16)

But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. (2 Peter 1:20-21)

Our English word *inspired* comes from a Greek term, *theopneustos*, meaning "God-breathed." The source of all Scripture is God. The Scriptures, while inspired by God, are also the product of being channeled through men. These men recorded divine truth as they were led by the Holy Spirit.

It is important to understand that this claim of inspiration is made by the Scriptures themselves. It is not something imposed on them by the church. From Genesis through Revelation the writers of Scriptures believed they were recording the Word of God. Consistently we find phrases like "Thus saith the Lord," "God said," "The Word of the Lord came unto..." and so on.

#### **Extent of Inspiration**

We repeat our citation of 2 Timothy 3:16 in preface to our discussion of the extent of inspiration:

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.

An important principle can be drawn from this passage: Inspiration of Scripture is plenary, meaning that it includes the entire body of Scripture. In context, Paul was speaking of the Old Testament. By inference, we extend the "Scriptures" to include also the New Testament because they were also read in the churches and were taught as God's Word.

#### Plenary Inspiration

"All" Scripture—the entire corpus of Scripture—is inspired by God. Inspiration is plenary, or "full." Every portion is "God-breathed."

Some verses alluding to this are Revelation 22:18-19; Matthew 5:17-18; Romans 15:4; Jeremiah 15:19; 26:2; 36:2; and Luke 24:44, which is reproduced here:

Now He said to them, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."

The clear teaching of Scripture is that the whole of it is inspired by God. Everything is considered accurate. That does not mean, however, that every statement in the Bible itself teaches truth. Satan's words, for example, are recorded accurately and are there because God wanted them there. But Satan did not tell the truth (John 8:44).

#### Verbal Inspiration

The Scripture indicates that inspiration extends not only to all of Scripture as a whole but to every word. It is not merely the thoughts or intentions of Scripture that are divinely inspired. Some of the verses upholding verbal inspiration include Jeremiah 1:7,9; Exodus 34:27; John 6:63; and Matthew 4:4, where Jesus says, "It is written, 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.'"

The truth of this teaching can be found in the fact that the apostles sometimes based their arguments on just one word of Scripture. For example, the apostle Paul cited a prophecy from the Old Testament and argued on the basis of one word in the Old Testament passage:

Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, "And to seeds," as referring to many, but rather to one, "And to your seed," that is, Christ. (Galatians 3:16)

#### **Fallible People Versus Infallible Bible**

An obvious question arises. How could fallible people produce an infallible Bible?

One of the most frequent arguments leveled against the infallibility of the Bible is based upon the fact that the Bible was written by human authors. Human beings are fallible. Since the Bible was written by these fallible human beings, it necessarily follows that the Bible is fallible. Or so the argument goes. As Roman Catholic scholar Bruce Vawter writes, "A human literature containing no error would indeed be a contradiction in terms, since nothing is more human than to err."<sup>19</sup>

Although we often hear this accusation, it is not correct. Here is an illustration: A teacher types a one-page outline of a course he is teaching. The finished product was inerrant; it had no typographical errors, no mistakes in copying from the handwritten original. Although the

author was human and was prone to make mistakes, he was, in fact, infallible in this instance.

The point is this: It is possible for a human being to perform a mistake-free act. It is possible for fallible people to correctly record sayings and events.

John Warwick Montgomery, lawyer and theologian, illustrates this truth:

The directions for operating my washing machine, for example, are literally infallible; if I do just what they say, the machine will respond. Euclid's *Geometry* is a book of perfect internal consistency; grant the axioms and the proofs follow inexorably. From such examples (and they could readily be multiplied) we must conclude that human beings, though they often err, need not err in all particular instances.<sup>20</sup>

The testimony of Scripture is clear. God used fallible people to receive and record his infallible Word so that it would reach us correct and without error.

### What About Contradictions?

If the Bible is the divinely inspired Word of God, then God is the one who is eventually responsible for its content. This being the case, we need to address the matter of so-called contradictions that are contained within its pages. A Bible containing errors or contradictions is inconsistent with the God it reveals. We will observe that a close evaluation of the matter shows that the Bible does not disagree with itself.

One of the things for which we appeal with regard to possible contradictions is fairness. We should not minimize or exaggerate the problem, and we must always begin by giving the author the benefit of the doubt. This is the rule in other literature, and we ask that it also be the rule here. We find so often that people want to employ a different set of rules when it comes to examining the Bible, and to this we immediately object.

What constitutes a contradiction? The law of noncontradiction, which is the basis of all logical thinking, states that a thing cannot be both *A* and *non-A* at the same time. In other words, it cannot be both raining and not raining at the same time.

If one can demonstrate a violation of this principle from Scripture, then and only then can he prove a contradiction. For example, if the Bible said—which it does not—that Jesus died by crucifixion both at Jerusalem and at Nazareth at the same time, this would be a provable error.

When facing possible contradictions, it is of the highest importance to remember that two statements may differ

from each other without being contradictory. Some fail to make a distinction between contradiction and difference.

For example, the case of the blind men at Jericho. Matthew relates how two blind men met Jesus, while both Mark and Luke mention only one. However, neither of these statements denies the other, but rather they are complementary.

Suppose you were talking to the mayor of your city and the chief of police at city hall. Later, you see your friend, Jim, and tell him you talked to the mayor today. An hour later, you see your friend, John, and tell him you talked to both the mayor and the chief of police.

When your friends compare notes, there is a seeming contradiction. But there is no contradiction. If you had told Jim that you talked *only* to the mayor, you would have contradicted that statement by what you told John.

The statements you actually made to Jim and John are different, but not contradictory. Likewise, many biblical statements fall into this category. Many think they find errors in passages that they have not correctly read.

In the book of Judges we have the account of the death of Sisera. Judges 5:25-27 is supposed to represent Jael as having slain him with her hammer and tent peg while he was drinking milk. Judges 4:21 says she did it while he was asleep. However, a closer reading of Judges 5:25-27 will reveal that it is not stated that he was drinking milk at the moment of impact. Thus, the discrepancy disappears.

Sometimes two passages appear to be contradictory because the translation is not as accurate as it could be. A knowledge of the original languages of the Bible can immediately solve these difficulties, for both Greek and Hebrew—as all languages—have their peculiarities that make them difficult to render into English or any other language.

A classic example concerns the accounts of Paul's conversion as recorded in the book of Acts. Acts 9:7 (King James Version) states, "The men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man." Acts 22:9 (King James Version) reads, "And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me."

These statements seem contradictory, with one saying that Paul's companions heard a voice, while the other account says no voice was heard. However, a knowledge of Greek solves this difficulty. As the Greek scholar W. F. Arndt explained:

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The construction of the verb “to hear” (*akouo*) is not the same in both accounts. In Acts 9:7 it is used with the genitive, in Acts 22:9 with the accusative. The construction with the genitive simply expresses that something is being heard or that certain sounds reach the ear; nothing is indicated as to whether a person understands what he hears or not.

The construction with the accusative, however, describes a hearing which includes mental apprehension of the message spoken. From this it becomes evident that the two passages are not contradictory.

Acts 22:9 does not deny that the associates of Paul heard certain sounds; it simply declares that they did not hear in such a way as to understand what was being said. Our English idiom in this case simply is not so expressive as the Greek.

It must also be stressed that when a possible explanation is given to a Bible difficulty, it is unreasonable to state that the passage contains a demonstrable error. Some difficulties in Scripture result from our inadequate knowledge about the circumstances and do not necessarily involve an error. These only prove that we are ignorant of the background.

While all Bible difficulties and discrepancies have not yet been cleared up, it is our firm conviction that as more knowledge is gained of the Bible's past, these problems will fade away.

### The Authority of Jesus Christ

When it comes to determining whether or not the Bible is the inspired Word of God we can rest confidently on the authority of Jesus Christ. We arrive at this conclusion by the following logic:

1. We have already shown that the New Testament can be trusted as an accurate historical document, giving firsthand information on the life of Jesus Christ.

2. In this accurate, historical document Jesus Christ is presented as having made certain claims about himself. He claimed to be the Messiah, the Son of God, the Way, the Truth, and the Life, the only way by which anyone can approach God.

3. Jesus Christ demonstrated that he had the right to make those Old Testament claims by fulfilling prophecies about the Messiah. He performed miracles, showing he had power over nature. The most significant miracle of all was his rising from the dead (John 2:19-21). The resurrection confirmed his claims to deity.

4. Since Jesus is the Messiah, God in human flesh, he is the last word on all matters. He had the divine authority to endorse all Scripture or some. He universally affirmed all Scripture, in every part, as the divine Word of God. The crucial issue of the inspiration of the Old Testament is solved by Jesus Christ and his attitude toward it. We see Jesus viewing the Old Testament with total trust, considering it the Word of God. See Matthew 15:3,6; 22:31-32; John 10:35; and Matthew 5:18.

If Jesus is who he claimed to be, God in human flesh, then his view of Scripture is of paramount importance. We see him constantly referring to it as sacred in his teachings and in discussions with the religious leaders of his day.

The conclusion is clear: since Jesus is God and authenticates the whole body and every portion of the Old Testament, we can conclude that it is the inspired Word of God.

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