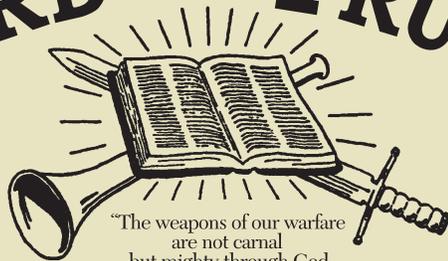


The SWORD and TRUMPET

"Blow ye
the Trumpet
and warn
the People."



"The weapons of our warfare
are not carnal
but mighty through God
to the pulling down of strongholds."

"Take the Sword
of the Spirit
which is
The Word of God."

Guidelines



JOHANN KEPLER

JUNE 2005

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Person of the Month:

Johann Kepler (1571-1630)

Johann was born prematurely December 27, 1571, in Weil der Stadt, Wurttemberg, Germany. His home was not a happy one. His father was a mercenary soldier who did not fare well financially. His mother, the daughter of an innkeeper, had a quarrelsome spirit.

Kepler was small for his age and not in good health but the Lord had given him a brilliant mind. This was to his advantage. Children from poor families would not have the benefit of an education but the dukes of Wurttemberg decided to give large scholarships to the sons of their poor subjects. Johann thus became the recipient of one of these scholarships. As a result he was able to go to the University of Tubingen in 1587 to study astronomy under Michael Mastlin—a proponent of the theory put forth by Copernicus. The influence of Copernicus through Johann's professor would greatly affect his future discoveries.

Johann Kepler was a devout Christian and wanted to become a Lutheran minister so in 1588 he received his BA and later his MA in 1591 from the university. In 1594, during the last year of his theology studies, there was a need for a teacher of mathematics in the Lutheran high school in Graz, Austria. He was highly recommended for the job and although he wanted to finish his theological training, Kepler reluctantly took the teaching position that the Lord had opened for him. One day, in 1595, as he was teaching one of his classes, Johann came up with a new and wondrous thought! Why not relate the orbits of the planets to geometrical figures? The ideas of Plato and Pythagoras influenced his thinking, leading him on to a great discovery. He published his first work that same year and sent it to various scientists in his field. One, in particular, a Tycho Brahe, who was the imperial mathematician of the Holy Roman Empire, recognized Kepler's genius and invited him to join his astronomy research team working outside of Prague. The year was 1600. When Brahe died the following year Kepler succeeded him as imperial mathematician. Brahe had assigned Johann to study the orbit of Mars but before he could do that Kepler felt he had to solve the problem of atmospheric refraction. In working on this problem of astronomy God led him to the discovery of the workings of the human eye and why curved pieces of glass (lenses for glasses) help a person's vision. His discovery became the foundation for all the further studies and progress in understanding how our eyes are structured and their function. From these discoveries he found out what happens to light after it enters a telescope and made one based on his findings.

Apparently Johann did not suffer at the hands of the church for this discovery and for others that would come later. Other godly men of science had received ill treatment from Rome because their discoveries, although true to the reality of God's creation, did not follow the stated dogma of the church and thus these findings were considered dangerous.

In 1609, while working on his research of the planet Mars, Kepler formulated two of his three principles of planetary motion which has made his name famous in the world of science. The first principle stated that planets move in an elliptical orbit, not a circular one (as had been previously believed). Secondly, he discovered that while revolving, a planet would sweep out in equal areas of the ellipse.

From his work in astronomy Kepler was also led to a research into the chronology

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Why Christians Believe the Bible Is the Word of God

by Thomas A. Thomas

The source of all theological knowledge is to be found in the Bible alone. And it is in the Bible because this Book is recognized as the Word of God written. One cannot appeal to human reason, experience, or any other source. God alone is the source, the authority, and the ultimate criterion for truth. And it is only from the Bible, as the Word of God, that we can know what God has to say.

But why do Christians believe the Bible is the inscripturated Word of God? The non-Christian world has rejected it. It is unusual to find any non-Christian philosopher or scientist who would give the slightest credence to it. And even many theologians to whom theology has been reduced to the philosophizing of men have no place for a written Word of God in their thinking. Why is it, then, that fundamental, orthodox Christians believe this doctrine when it is so commonly rejected by others? Is the Christian more intelligent than the non-Christian? Or does he have some special information which the non-Christian does not?

Certainly the Christian, believing that the Bible is the Word of God, is not therefore more intelligent than the non-Christian who does not. There are many non-Christians with brilliant, well-trained minds who reject the divine authorship of the Scriptures. Acceptance or rejection is not a matter of intelligence. The traditional approach has been, however, to regard the Christian as having certain information about the Bible which the non-Christian does not possess. The

thought is that the reason the non-Christian does not accept the Bible as the Word of God written is that he has not given sufficient consideration to all of the alleged proofs for the inspiration of the Scriptures. If only he would consider these "proofs" he just couldn't help but believe that the Bible is the Word of God.

We shall not attempt to enumerate these "proofs" of the Bible's inspiration. They are many and varied. Among the most common are:

(1) *Fulfilled Prophecy*. There are many prophecies in the Scriptures, some of them in considerable detail, which have been fulfilled to the very letter, just as it had been predicted. In some cases the fulfillment took place hundreds, a thousand or more years after the prophecy was given.

(2) *The Unity of the Bible*. The Scriptures were written by perhaps forty or more men, over a period of approximately 1500 years. Yet they present an amazing unity. These men were of different backgrounds, education, temperament, personalities, and some of them lived in different ages, centuries apart, but there is one unified theme running all the way through the Bible, from beginning to end, from Genesis to Revelation. It is salvation, redemption. Surely, it is argued, no other book has this characteristic. This unity speaks of one author, God.

(3) *The Bible Changes Lives*. Multitudes, it is argued, have had their lives radically changed as a result of the influence of the Bible. Drunken bums in the skid row slums of our cities have

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been delivered from their enslavement to alcohol to lead respectable lives, honoring and glorifying to God, and in some cases have even become evangelists and preachers of righteousness. Many who had been living in gross immorality have turned away from their sin to lives of purity and holiness. And then also, great numbers who had not been involved in heinous sin but who had been living for the things of the world, the flesh, and self, have had their lives completely changed and reoriented through the power of the Bible.

These, and numerous other arguments, have been produced by well-meaning Christians with the object in mind of proving to non-Christians that the Bible is the Word of God. Now we would not deny the truth of these so-called proofs in themselves. That is, certainly it is true that prophecy has been fulfilled. Every prophecy that should have been fulfilled up to this present time has been fulfilled exactly as the Scriptures said. And the Bible does present an amazing unity. It is true that there is one unified theme running throughout the entirety of the Book. And we would be in complete agreement with the fact that the Bible does change lives. Radical and revolutionary changes have taken place in the lives of uncounted multitudes through the influence of the Bible.

But in each of these "proofs" for the Bible's divine source there is a very basic fallacy. In each case *man* is placed in the position of being the judge over the character of a Book which would never grant that man has a right to that position. According to the Bible man is a creature; God is his Creator. And as a creature man is to obey and serve and seek to glorify his Creator. He is never granted the position or right to sit in judgment over his Creator or the Word of his Creator. And so by the very act of appealing to him to pass judgment on the divine authorship of the

Bible, by granting that he has the right to determine whether it is the Word of God or not, we are in reality denying the Bible. We are saying that man is the judge over a Book which says he is not the judge. And so if man has a right to that position then the Bible is wrong, and it cannot be the Word of God. The traditional method of approach, then, instead of proving the Bible is the Word of God, which it seeks to do, in reality, by its method, is denying that which it is concerned to prove. And one certainly cannot prove his Faith if he begins by denying it.

The question remains, then, Why do Christians believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God? Why do Christians accept that which the non-Christian world rejects? The answer is, not that we are more intelligent, not that we have more information, but that we are different. God has made us different, by His sovereign grace. He has regenerated us and illumined us. The picture of the non-Christian that is presented in the Bible is that he is one who is spiritually dead and spiritually blind. He is "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1). "The god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not" (2 Cor. 4:4). Their understanding is darkened and their minds are blind (Eph. 4:18). They cannot receive, or know, or understand spiritual truth, for it is foolishness unto them. It can be discerned only through the power of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 2:14). And so he could not be expected to recognize the truth that the Bible is the inspired Word of God. But, according to the Scriptures, God, by His grace, has dealt in a very special way with the Christian to remove these maladies which afflict us and prevent our ability to be receptive to "the things of the Spirit of God." He has regenerated us; He has infused into that which was dead spiritual life; we have been "born again." He has ripped

the spiritual blinders of sin from our eyes so we can now see. He has taken us out of death into life and out of darkness into light. Now we are able to receive, and know, and understand spiritual truth whereas before we were not. Now, therefore, we can recognize the Bible for what it is, the very inspired, inscripturated, Word of God.

As a result of the new birth we have furthermore taken on a new relationship with God. We were once “alienated from the life of God” (Eph. 4:18); at “enmity against God” (Rom. 8:7); and “were by nature the children of wrath, even as others” (Eph. 2:3). But God, in His sovereign grace, has placed us in a new relationship with Himself. We are now His children, He is our Father. “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:26). And as the children of God we can now recognize the voice of our Father. In the earthly sphere a child recognizes the voice of his physical father. One may not have heard his father’s voice for many years but if he were to hear that voice again he would immediately recognize it. Why? Because that is his father and he knows his father, and his father’s voice. So it is in the spiritual realm. As the children of God we know our Heavenly Father’s voice. As we read the Bible we recognize our Father speaking there. This is our Father’s voice. And His Spirit bears witness in our hearts that this is truly His voice, this is His Word, this is the very Word of God.

Will the unregenerate person recognize this basis of the Christian’s conviction that the Bible is the Word of God? Certainly not. He is spiritually dead and blind, and “receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him,” but that in no way means that we should therefore deny its truth. Only when he too is regenerated by the power of the Holy Spirit, and is taken out of his spiritual

darkness into light, will he be able to recognize this Book for what it truly is, the Word of God written.

The question may be raised, then, what place do the traditional proofs for the inspiration of the Bible have? How do they fit in to the thinking of the Christian? Just in this way. Instead of saying, prophecy has been fulfilled, the Bible is a unity presenting one unified theme throughout, the Bible has produced radical and revolutionary changes in the lives of a great many people, therefore it is the Word of God, the procedure should, rather, be *reversed*. The Bible is the Word of God, therefore prophecy has been fulfilled just as the Scriptures have said, for God is the one who has brought to pass, and will bring to pass, that which He has determined. The Bible is the Word of God, therefore it is a unified book with one unified theme throughout, even though it was written by some forty men over a period of approximately 1500 years, for it has in reality one ultimate author, God. The Bible is the Word of God, therefore the lives of multitudes have been changed by its power.

In other words, instead of saying, “These things are true, therefore the Bible is the Word of God,” our argument should be, “The Bible is the Word of God, therefore these things are true.” In other words, these things, rather than being the *proofs* that the Bible is the Word of God are the *products* of the fact that it is the Word of God. By this method of approach we are not granting to the unregenerate man the right to sit in judgment over the Bible as to whether it meets with his approval and conforms to the criteria which he has established. He is a creature, and thus is to be in subjection to the Word of his Creator. He is to believe it, and obey it, but never to judge it. ■

—Taken from *The Doctrine of the Word of God* with permission



From the Editor's Desk

Paul M. Emerson

GUEST EDITORIAL

Interpretation

by Harold S. Martin

The Bible is a profound book because it is a revelation from God, and because its writers were inspired by God. The Bible is not always a simple book for the human mind to understand, and so the Bible does need interpretation.

If we read, for example, 1 John 1:7, “The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin”—what does that sentence mean?

Surely it does not mean that the physical blood of Jesus could save from sin. Suppose we would have held a sinner, on the day of the Crucifixion, under the cross, and let the blood of the dying Jesus drip down on him—would that have saved him? Obviously that is not the meaning.

But what does the text mean? The answer to that question requires interpretation. There are a number of basic principles which help us interpret carefully.

1. Try to discover what the words mean.

When we read Romans 12:9, “Let love be without dissimulation” (KJV)—that verse may not say much to us because we don’t know what *dissimulation* is. So we turn to a dictionary and find the meaning of the word. We discover that the word in question means

“to be hypocritical; to hide one’s motives”—and so the text says, “Let your love be genuine and sincere, not merely polite on the outside.”

2. Interpret the passage in light of the context.

Note the difference between the word *elder* (KJV) in 1 Timothy 5:1 and in 1 Timothy 5:17. In 5:1, Paul is talking about an older man; the setting in 5:2 speaks about an older woman. In 5:17, by way of contrast, he is talking about church leaders who “rule well” and “labor in the word and doctrine”—and so *there* he is talking about elders in light of their position.

3. Examine carefully all Scriptures that relate to a passage.

Many times the Bible treats the same subject in a number of different places. The more clear parts must be allowed to throw light on the parts that are not as clear. We must remember that the promise in Matthew 7:7—“Ask, and it will be given to you”—is not a blank check promising that we will get everything we ask for. Other passages speak about the same subject. For example, James 4:3 says, “You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you

may spend it on your pleasures.”

4. Try to learn the meaning of a phrase in the original language.

Ideally, this requires knowledge of Greek and Hebrew, but practically, it means that we need to use helpful study tools. If we compare Galatians 6:2 with Galatians 6:5, we may at first sense a contradiction. But the word *burden* in 6:2 literally means “a weight, or crushing heavy blow,” while the word *burden* in 6:5 literally means “a task or a service.” We are to show sympathy for the person enduring a heavy blow, but each person must learn to perform his own ordinary tasks in life.

5. Determine the literary nature of the passage to be studied.

Is the passage ordinary prose (just a statement of fact), or is it poetry, a proverb, a parable, an allegory, or apocalyptic literature? Acts 2:23, “. . . you have taken [him] by lawless hands . . . and put [him] to death”—is ordinary prose. When Isaiah 55:12 says, “. . . all the trees of the field shall clap their hands”—we sense the use of *poetry*, enhanced through the use of figures of speech. And a *proverb* by definition is a concise truth not intended to apply universally to all people in every situation. When we read that “no grave trouble will overtake the righteous” (Proverbs 12:21)—we know that generally those words are true, but in exceptional cases, great harm *has* come to the righteous.

Even with diligent study and careful interpretation, there will be portions of the Bible that we still do not understand. We must be careful not to try to prove our own preconceived ideas by twisting a text and seeking to make it say what it does not say. In the article featured in this issue of the *Witness* Jim Myer gives us an insightful and practical set of principles that will help us in our Bible study. ■

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JOHANN KEPLER . . . cont’d.

of the Bible and the age of the earth. From his study he believed the earth to be 7,000 years old. As an astronomer Johann Kepler was not presumptuous. He felt that he was only “thinking God’s thoughts after Him.” He wrote that he felt astronomers were only God’s priests when it came to the natural world around them. They should not be thinking about the greatness of men’s minds but rather, the glory of God. God’s glory should be uppermost in their thoughts.

During his time in Prague Johann’s wife died. Also, his patron, the Holy Roman Emperor, was forced to give up his throne. The new emperor gave him back his position as imperial mathematician but Kepler left Prague and went to Linz, Austria. In 1613 Johann remarried.

In 1619 he formulated his third principle, sometimes referred to as the 3/2 ratio, which has to do with the relationship of a planet’s mean distance from the sun to the time it takes to complete its elliptical orbit around the sun. Johann’s research results were later a help to Isaac Newton in his work with gravity.

In 1627 Johann was able to print his Rudolphine Tables in Ulm, Germany. These tables contained an extended catalog of 1,005 stars based on Tycho’s observations. The peasants of Linz rebelled because they were being forced to return to Catholicism and they also were asked to pay heavy taxes. As a result of the upheaval, Kepler was not able to continue his work there so he and his family moved to Zagan in Silesia in 1628 to find a new home and a new patron. His new patron, Albrecht von Wallenstein, the duke of Friedland and Zagan, proved unreliable. As a result, Johann left his family in Zagan while he traveled west on financial business. He passed through the town of the Imperial Free City of Regensburg in his travels. While there he became very ill and died on November 30, 1630, a month short

(continued on page 22)

THE SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS



A Devotional Commentary



by David L. Burkholder

JUNE 5, 2005

Preparation for Ministry

Mark 1:4-13

This quarter's lessons focus on Jesus' life, teachings, and ministry. They are taken from the gospels of Mark (June), Matthew (July), and Luke (August). A reading of these gospels will deepen your understanding of Jesus' life and ministry and will certainly enhance your study. The first two lessons fit in and around text and themes we studied from Mark in January on the beginning of Jesus' ministry and the calling of disciples.

Today's lesson from Mark 1 focuses on Jesus' preparation for ministry, His baptism, and temptation. Mark introduces "the gospel of Jesus Christ" by reference to the Old Testament prophecies of Isaiah and Malachi regarding Messiah's herald, John the Baptist. His task was to prepare the way for the Messiah.

The first half of today's text focuses on John in his role as announcer of the coming One. John, that rough-hewn embodiment of Elijah, drew large crowds to his outdoor arena. The people were in expectation after many centuries without a prophetic voice. They heard him gladly and responded en masse to his call for repentance and baptism. John made it clear that he was not the Messiah (see John 1:19-27), but was only sent to prepare the way for Him. He recognized the superiority of the One to come and his own relative insignificance. But he willingly accepted his role in God's overall plan.

Then Jesus came to where John was preaching and submitted to baptism as a means of identifying with His people. Cer-

tainly His was not a baptism of repentance, for none was needed for the sinless Son of God. (Read the other gospel accounts of Jesus' baptism for details omitted by Mark.) Immediately Jesus received confirmation by both the Holy Spirit and the Father in this initiation into His work as Saviour of mankind. The Holy Spirit descended from heaven in the form of a dove and the Father spoke in audible voice confirming Jesus' sonship and affirming His pleasure with Jesus' willingness to enter upon His designated role.

Further preparation for Jesus' ministry lay ahead. He was immediately led of the Spirit into the quietness of the wilderness for a period of intense spiritual testing. He was there alone, for 40 days, except for Satan, the wild beasts, and the ministering angels. His temptations were fought alone—and He emerged victorious. (See Hebrews 4:15.)

There are many lessons to be learned from this period of Jesus' preparation for ministry: submission, humility, willingness, identification. Reflect how these experiences fitted Jesus for His life's work among men. Reflect, too, how these same elements are so essential for preparation for effective service today. If Jesus needed preparation for ministry, how much more do we.

For thought and discussion

1. Be sure to understand the role of John the Baptist in announcing the ministry of Jesus the Christ.
2. Why was John's message so readily received by the masses?
3. It takes a big man to play "second fiddle" as John did. Think about what makes such a person great. See Jesus' comment about John in Matthew 11:11 and Luke 7:28.

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4. Of what benefit do you think the confirmations Jesus received from the Holy Spirit and the Father were to Him?
5. Reflect on how these varied experiences of Jesus in today's lesson prepared Him to minister to the needs of mankind. Perhaps some class discussion would be beneficial.

JUNE 12, 2005

Healing and Conflict

Mark 2:1-12

In the intervening verses between last Sunday's lesson and today's, we see Jesus going forth on His mission. He preached, taught in the synagogues, healed the sick, and cast out evil spirits—ministering both to man's physical and spiritual needs. He also began calling disciples.

In Chapter 2, Jesus' ministry enters a new phase, one that stirs opposition from the religious leaders. Here He declares Himself one with God, opening Himself, in the eyes of the scribes, to the charge of blasphemy. Their blind eyes, and hearts, failed to make the connection which Jesus offered between Himself and God.

After ministering to the crowds in "desert places" (1:45), Jesus reentered Capernaum to continue His teaching and healing ministry. Again crowds flocked to hear Him and gathered around the house where He was preaching. Into this setting came four men carrying a friend who was a paralytic. Unable to gain access through the door, they took their friend to the roof and removed roof material to let the man down into the presence of Jesus. That's when the controversy began.

When Jesus pronounced the paralytic's sins forgiven, the scribes took offense: "Who can forgive sins but God only?" Jesus then gave them another strong clue as to His identity by describing to them the very thoughts of their hearts. But they were willfully blind. They failed to grasp the significance of what they were seeing and hearing.

Jesus then offered additional proof of His authority by posing another searching question: "Which is easier, to forgive sins or to cause the lame to walk?" Then, to prove His divine identity and authority to forgive sins, He commanded the paralytic to get up and walk. And he, with an exercise of faith, obeyed. Out he walked, healed in body and soul—much to the amazement of the crowd, and the consternation of the scribes.

Certainly any observer with an open mind would have caught the impact of what had happened. No one can "see" sins forgiven, but a lame man walking is an obvious portrayal of divine power. It should have been easy to make the connection between power to heal and authority to forgive sins. Many saw it and glorified God.

To the religious leaders, however, Jesus' claims were absurd. Who was this man to claim equality with God, and pronounce forgiveness that only God could extend? As we read on in the Book of Mark, we see that this occasion was the opening of an ongoing conflict between Jesus and the scribes and Pharisees. Their animosity increased and they began seeking ways to destroy Him.

How unfortunate that those who were responsible to guard the truth of God's Word failed to recognize in Jesus the fulfillment of the prophecies of that Word. By contrast, how blessed were those who did accept Jesus as the promised One and thus came to enjoy the blessings He came to bring to mankind.

For thought and discussion

1. What was the basis for Jesus' appeal to the crowds?
2. Whose faith was active in the healing of the paralytic?
3. There is no one so blind as he who is willfully blind. How can we guard against spiritual blindness? Discuss.
4. Why was it so difficult for the religious leaders, those who knew the Old Testament Scriptures, to accept Jesus as the promised Messiah?

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SWORD AND TRUMPET

5. Does it seem that the exercise of faith is not as great today as it has been in the past? What can we do to increase faith? Maybe this would be a good topic for discussion.

JUNE 19, 2005

Jesus on Trial

Mark 14:53-65; 15:1-3

In today's lesson we skip over the bulk of Jesus' ministry and find Him on trial before the Sanhedrin. Things were rapidly drawing to a close in the conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders. Jesus had been betrayed by one of His disciples, forsaken by the rest, and was now standing trial alone and undefended. Crucifixion was just hours away.

The total injustice of the scene here portrayed is that sentence had already been passed upon Jesus by the Sanhedrin and they were simply looking now for those willing to give witness against Him to confirm their sentence. (See v. 55 and Matthew 26:59.) We note, too, that the religious leaders were massed against Jesus and in one accord with their condemnation of Him.

It is interesting that the only witnesses against Jesus were false witnesses and certainly understandable that their testimony did not agree. Who can bear testimony of wrongdoing by Christ? No one. And what Jew, in a normal judicial situation, would have dared put himself in jeopardy by giving false witness? (See Exodus 20:16; 23:1; Proverbs 19:5.) But here we see hatred carried to the extreme and the developing of a mob spirit which defies reason and causes man to do abominable things.

Stymied by the lack of credible witnesses for their case, the high priest prodded Jesus for some response to what was being said about Him. He remained silent. Finally the high priest, against all judicial protocol in not requiring a person on trial to testify against himself or give a potentially condem-

natory answer, asked Jesus pointblank, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?"

Jesus' answer gave them the opening they desired. His answer, in their view, condemned Him to death by His claiming Himself to be divine. Then, in what was likely only a symbolic display of grief or horror, the high priest tore his clothes and called for the verdict. They had what they were looking for, the charge of blasphemy which automatically conveyed the sentence of death. They were in agreement. They condemned Him to death, which posed another problem they sought to solve by taking Him to Pilate the Roman governor.

Before Pilate, Jesus again refused to defend Himself, simply acknowledging that what Pilate said was true: He was indeed the King of the Jews. But He was denied by His would-be subjects who continued to rail at Him. But again, His accusers got what they wanted, the sentence of death to be officially carried out by the occupying power. (Read the rest of Chapter 15.)

Note the warning Jesus gave to His accusers in 14:62. A time was coming when they would be on trial before Him, with roles reversed, and they would be held accountable for their gross miscarriage of justice. They would be standing trial before this Son of man to answer for their misdeeds. What a shocking experience awaits them. (See Revelation 1:7.)

For thought and discussion

1. Learn what you can about the Jewish Sanhedrin—and its miscarriage of justice in their case against Jesus.
2. Reflect on how intense hatred clouds justice and thoughtful reasoning.
3. Silence can be golden. Other times it is just plain yellow. How do we determine when best to speak and when best to keep silent? Discuss.
4. Think of the terrible guilt incurred by those who falsely condemned Jesus. Was there any hope for these men? Would you want to be in their shoes when they stand before the Righteous Judge? Not I!

5. Yes, all of this was in the plan and purpose of God. But don't allow that fact to diminish the pain and suffering—both physical and emotional—that Christ went through. And remember, it was for you.

JUNE 26, 2005

Jesus: Triumphant Over Death

Mark 16:1-16

The powers of darkness had had their day. Jesus had been crucified, declared dead, and laid in a tomb. His enemies were rid of Him—or so they thought. In their failure to recognize Him for who He was, however, they failed also to recognize the power inherent in Him, the power over death. In today's text we study the resurrection of Jesus, His appearances to disciples and the commission He gave them before ascending into heaven to take up His position at the right hand of the Father.

After waiting out the Sabbath, the faithful women followers made their way to the tomb in the early morning hours with plans to anoint the body of Jesus. Their plans were drastically changed. Obviously they had not understood Jesus' statement that He would rise again. (See Matthew 26:32; Mark 14:28.) As they arrived at the tomb, their concern over rolling away the stone from the door became moot. The tomb was empty. Nothing was as they had expected.

The heavenly messenger sought to set their minds at ease and explain what had happened. But they were not prepared for what they heard. They could see that Jesus was not there, but they had difficulty grasping the fact that He was alive. They left the sepulcher in bewilderment and fear. They also left with a message to go and tell the disciples that their Lord was alive.

Perhaps as a reward for her faithful service, Jesus' first appearance was to Mary Magdalene. After this encounter Mary was ready to tell what she had seen, that Jesus

was indeed alive. But the disciples were faithless; they did not believe her message. (See Luke 24:11.) Even after the two disciples from Emmaus (Luke 24) reaffirmed Mary's announcement, the eleven were still disbelieving, unwilling to accept eye-witness testimony that Jesus was alive. One wonders at their obstinacy. Why could they not believe the word of their friends?

However, all doubt was wiped away when Jesus Himself appeared in their midst. He first rebuked them for their unbelief and then charged them with a message. This message of the Gospel was a message of hope for a sin-darkened world. It was a message of eternal life. It was a message of a power that overcomes death. The negative side of the message was that for those who refused the free offer of salvation, eternal damnation awaited.

The angel at the tomb gave the women a timely and timeless message: go and tell. Jesus reaffirmed this injunction in His commission to the disciples. In a very real way that is the commission to each of Jesus' followers. We are all under orders to take this message of hope and salvation to a lost and dying world. We who bear witness to the power of the living Christ are under obligation to share His transforming work with others.

For thought and discussion

1. Reflect on the courage and dedication of the women who followed and ministered to Jesus, both in life and in death. Let their commitment challenge you.
2. Why the special message to Peter in verse seven? Explore the reason.
3. How did the disciples miss Jesus' teaching about His resurrection, and why did they not believe those who had seen Him alive?
4. A secondary message in this lesson is that of faith. Note the negative example of the disciples and the positive aspect mentioned in verse 16.
5. How can we improve in carrying out the commission to "go and tell"? Discuss. ■

Newslines . . .

by Rebecca Good

incidents events occurrences facts illustrations episodes committees vignettes proceedings problems
experiences crises adventures transactions meetings tragedies scoops reports conferences happenings
bulletins questions reports affairs dramas encounters personages actions tidings et cetera

Christian Yoga—An Oxymoron?

“Christian yoga” or “yoga for Christians” programs are springing up at gyms and churches all over the nation, as Christians aim to combine the physical benefits of yoga with Christian spirituality. According to Doug Groothuis, a professor of philosophy at Denver Seminary, it cannot be done. “Yoga is rooted in Hinduism and cannot be separated from it. There’s nothing wrong with stretching and calming down one’s breathing. But yoga isn’t really about that; it’s aimed at transforming human consciousness to experience the Hindu god, which is a false god.”

Laurette Wilson, founder of an alternative Christian program, says the goal of all yoga is to obtain oneness with the universe, which it attempts by numbing the human mind. Some refer to this as the process of enlightenment, or union with Brahma (Hinduism’s highest god).

There is a type of yoga referred to as *hatha* yoga, which is taught at most gyms, and is touted as being a less spiritual form of yoga. But even in this format, Hinduism peeps through. *Namaste*, a word often used at the end of a yoga session, means, “I bow to the god within you.” Yoga groups often chant the sound *om*, designed to put participants into a trance so that they can join with the universal mind. Most classes begin with a “salute to the sun” which is meant to honor the Hindu sun god.

Yoga is often thought to offer physical

benefits: improved flexibility, weight loss, reduced stress, and improved circulation. To claim the good without the bad, Laurette has come up with her own Christian alternative to yoga, a book and video called PraiseMoves. Her program consists of gentle stretches that correlate with Scripture verses. For example, “The Eagle” stretch is maintained while Laurette reads Isaiah 40:31.

Laurette is certifying instructors to teach PraiseMoves across the country. Her advice to Christians who practice yoga: Pay close attention to any feelings of hesitation—and then check out the facts.

—from *Today’s Christian Woman*

* * * * *

I Hear the Train a’Coming

The nation’s railroads slipped into slow decline in the 1950s, when trucks began rolling down the new interstate highway system, carrying goods across the country. Now, almost 50 years later, shippers are suddenly seeing the advantages of using our nation’s rail lines. Trucking is plagued by chronic driver shortages, skyrocketing insurance premiums, and expensive oil. Trucks sometimes face traffic jams in urban centers. On the other hand, trains are three times more fuel efficient than trucks. More and more, they are being viewed as the best way to haul freight for long distances.

—from *U.S. News & World Report*

* * * * *

Points Against Same-Sex Unions

Children need mothers and fathers. Thousands of social science studies have “discovered” this “new” fact: Children denied mothers and fathers experience many problems which children from intact homes do not. Compassionate societies aid the fatherless rather than create more fatherless and motherless homes. In contrast, those advocating same-sex unions are concerned only with the immediate gratification of a small number of the present generation.

In every society, it is important that almost every man finds a woman to commit himself exclusively to, and that both then work together to raise the next generation. This is what marriage is about—the future. —from *Citizen Magazine*

The Penomnehal Pweor of the Hmuan Mnid

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Amzanig huh?

—from *Graduate Institute of Applied Linguistics Newsletter*

Christians Around the World

Percent of Americans who say they are Christians—81

Percent of earth's population who say they are Christians—33

—from *Newsweek*

How the Kingdom Grew

In A.D. 40, there were probably 1,000

Christians in the Roman Empire. By 350, the number of Christians had risen to nearly 34 million, over half the population.

Historians and sociologists tell us that the Christian faith gave people a new love, a compelling story, and the opportunity to be part of a rich, dense community. Christians also reached out to their neighbors through charity work. Another important point: In the church, abortion and female infanticide were eliminated, and women were valued, which insured that Christian families would rear Christian children for the church. —from *Newsweek*

Iranian Church Is Growing

In *The Voice of the Martyrs (VOM)*, Todd Nettleton reports that good things are happening in Iran. “The Lord is doing great, great things in the Church there, and it’s exciting to see what’s going to happen.” He goes on to say, “I do know, however, that there is a rapidly growing, very excited, very evangelical church that is being rooted in Iran, and whatever happens, that Church is going to have an impact on the people around them and on the society as a whole.” More and more Muslims in Iran are converting to Christianity.

They face persecution and discrimination. Government spies closely monitor Christian groups, and witnessing is not allowed.

VOM asks Western believers to pray that evangelical Christians would be inspired with creative ways to share the Gospel with their countrymen.

—from *AgapePress*

People Leaving the Church, Or Church Leaving the People?

The Interdenominational Ecumenical Research Committee recently concluded a year-long survey of 14,000 UK churchgoers, asking why so many Brits and Irish have forsaken the church, even

though two-thirds of the population claim to believe in God. The survey asked four simple questions, and asked for written answers, rather than “fill-in-the-box” responses.

Though unexpected, there was a huge response—people were glad somebody had finally asked!

Ninety-one percent of respondents said that the reason so few people in the UK attend church is because the churches do not teach the traditional Christian morals and doctrine. They said that apologetics, the reasoned defense and explanation of Christian doctrine, has declined to such an extent that there is nothing left to support Biblical Christian faith. Thousands of letters mentioned the lack of teaching on God’s holiness and the need for personal moral conversion. Many said the church taught easy forgiveness—“God loves me anyway,” so there is no need to live a morally demanding Christian life.

Some Anglican clerics reported finding it necessary to keep their views to

themselves, for fear that their bishop would remove them from their diocese. Two thousand letters said they wanted to return to traditional liturgy, pointing out that “jazzed-up offerings” had failed to attract the young and had even alienated older parishioners.

Most were strongly opposed to the ordination of homosexuals. Some celibates who struggle with homosexual temptation wrote saying the church is undermining their struggle to live pure lives. One young man wrote, “For sections of the Church to suddenly say that my struggle (to remain chaste) . . . was for nothing and that it would have been okay to have given in, would be to deny my personal cross for Christ and mock the faithfulness I have shown Him.”

To conclude, the survey told us what most already knew: “There is little point in attending a church whose message is no different from that of the materialistic secular world.”

—from *LifeSiteNews.com*

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Biblical Interpretation

by Lloyd Hartzler

Two great needs face us in interpreting the Word of God: a firm faith in the authority of Scripture, and a sound method of interpreting Scripture.

In the Bible God reveals His ways with mankind. Inspired and directed by the Holy Spirit, holy men wrote it, in language of common, everyday life, and for all people everywhere—a message for all times and situations.

This heavenly revelation to man is an unchangeable Word, God's only message to the human race. God loves man. He pleads with man to know God and to have a knowledge of His will. He designed His Word to be understood by man. And in God's holiness and justice the Lord will judge us by this Word. Thus He expects us to know it and believe it. We praise Him for the assurance that He has said what He meant and meant what He said!

Yes, God has spoken. What has He said? What does it mean? This is our responsibility—a high and holy one. With Moses of old, we are on holy ground! We dare not tread lightly and flippantly.

Philip asked the Ethiopian, who was reading from Isaiah 53, if he understood what he was reading. He said, "How can I, except some man should guide me?" (Acts 8:30, 31). In the days of Ezra "they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading" (Nehemiah 8:8). In both Old and New Testaments the Lord used His faithful servants to make His Word intelligent to listeners and readers. This in no way rules out or limits the work of the Holy Spirit in guiding the individual into truth. The Lord does not give to everyone the same ability to understand and teach His Word. We are thankful for the many saints who have helped us to understand the Word.

Not many decades ago, we were hearing of study committees being appointed by

church groups to "restudy" certain doctrines or applications of the Word. We find no fault with restudying the Word, but these studies often explained away some Biblical doctrines and gave more worldly liberties to church members. Today in the Mennonite church we are faced with explaining away the Biblical teaching on the veiling for women, the holy kiss, divorce and remarriage, nonresistance, nonconformity to the world, respect for authority, and others. There are few doctrines, that were held and practiced by Mennonites 70 years ago, which are not being attacked by Mennonites somewhere today. The Bible has not changed! Men have deviated from faithful interpretation of the Word.

The meaning of Scripture is not anyone's guess. When someone says a certain Scripture means this to me, and someone else says it means something else to him, we are faced with a renewed need of guidelines for Biblical interpretation. Truly "no vocation is fraught with more solemn responsibility than to labor in the Scripture as interpreters, teachers, and preachers of the Word. The judgment that awaits us in that day will be more exacting than that of others (James 3:1) . . . The only legitimate concern is not *who* is right, but *what* is right, what is true . . . There can be no greater affront to God than to labor in the Scriptures without sincere intention and constant concern to be true to the Author and His Word. We dare not be casual toward truth nor trifle with the Scripture.¹

In its strictest sense, *interpretation* involves reproducing the thought of the writer, involving no original thought on the part of the interpreter. We are to ascertain what God is teaching, not what we can make it teach. The Apostle Paul steered clear of dealing deceitfully with the Word of God (2 Cor. 2:17; 4:1, 2). At least three times the Lord forbids adding

to His Word; Moses, the first writer, in Deuteronomy 4:2—"Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it"; about the middle of the Bible, in Proverbs 30:5, 6—"Every word of God is pure . . . add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee"; and the final warning in Revelation 22:18, 19—"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: 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."

When we read an obituary or the account of an accident, we seldom need an interpreter. However, the inspired Word of God stands in stark contrast to man's writings. Therefore we need to consider:

1. *The language change.* This necessitates translation and some help in understanding the various shades of meaning of some of the Hebrew and Greek words. But God knew this; it is no surprise to Him. He was overshadowing it all. But it points up the need of interpretation in order to know better the thought of God.

2. *The cultural differences and practices.* To gain some knowledge about Jewish engagement and wedding practices, as well as some insight concerning some idolatrous practices, helps us in our understanding of the Word.

3. *Different historical setting.* A study of the history of the nations who were contemporary with Israel and the early church gives us better insight into some of the experiences of God's people. For example, to know that Nero reigned from A.D. 54-68 helps us to understand better the trials of the early Christians.

4. *Man's limitations in the flesh.* Sin has darkened man's understanding; we need to guard against error. God knew this too, and gave to the Christian the presence and help of the Holy Spirit, plus the differing

gifts in the brotherhood. Paul says, "That ye may be able to comprehend with all saints" (Eph. 3:18).

5. *Man's unwillingness to believe and accept what the Scripture teaches.* We are so quick to stumble at some teachings in the Word, saying they are not reasonable in these times. "Through faith we understand . . ." (Heb. 11:3).

The interpreter must possess some very important qualifications. He must be born of the same Spirit who inspired holy men to write. "Now we have received . . . the same spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God" (1 Cor. 2:12).

The interpreter must have a deep reverence for God and His Word. David said, "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him" (Psalm 25:14). The interpreter must have a strong desire to know God's Word. The messenger said to Daniel, "Thou didst set thine heart to understand" (Daniel 10:12). He must have complete dependence on the Holy Spirit. Paul said he spoke "not in the words which man's wisdom teaches, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual" (1 Cor. 2:13). "The eyes of your understanding being enlightened" (Eph. 1:17, 18).

The interpreter must believe the Word and submit to all of it. "If thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; . . . Then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God" (Proverbs 2:1-5). This is God's promise to us!

One of the hardest things for the interpreter to do is to put away a strong bias—a highly personal judgment or prejudice. This certainly takes the help of the Lord. We must come to the Word to see what it says, rather than to prove what we want it to say.

Someone has said, "Perception of the truth begins with silence." Too often our own peculiar views have colored our interpretation of the Word. Will we admit it and deal with it? An ancient writer said, "If a man learns without preconceived ideas, he

has ears to hear the truth.”

The interpreter will keep in mind some self-evident facts:

1. The true purpose of speech is to impart thought.

2. Language is a reliable means of communication. Otherwise, legal papers and wills would have no validity. We must have confidence in the writers’ use of language as inspired by the Holy Spirit.

3. When a word may have more than one meaning, the usage of the word in a given context determines its meaning. The word *hour* in Matthew 10:19 would indicate a much briefer time than *hour* in John 13:1 or 5:25, 28, 29.

4. The true purpose of interpretation is to ascertain the exact thought of the Author. Do we know God’s mind better than the writer of Scripture? The interpreter is not responsible for the message, whether it seems right or wrong, consistent or inconsistent. He is responsible to determine, as far as possible, the exact thought of the writer and leave the responsibility of the message with the Author.

5. Truth must harmonize with truth. Seeming contradictions will harmonize when the facts are known. For example, it is no problem to harmonize Hosea 11:1 with Micah 5:2 since we know the facts.

6. A person cannot interpret without understanding what he interprets. Else he may not be able to tell others the meaning of a Scripture without changing or modifying it. If a Scripture is not clear, then read, pray, study until it becomes clear. It is far better to admit we don’t know or are not sure than to give a wrong interpretation to God’s holy Word.

Why do two Christian men arrive at two different interpretations of a given Scripture? Various things enter into the answer to this question: a difference in their amount of study and of their knowledge of Scripture; differences in their sources of study and information (one may be relying more on what other writers have to say than on personal, Spirit-directed study of the Scriptures). And perhaps the greatest

factor in differing interpretation is a personal bias. How fully are both interpreters 100% open to truth? *The Holy Spirit works with our openness to the truth.* We need “transparent honesty” instead of trying to score points for a theological argument.

How does God get His thoughts, words, message to man’s needs? Through divine *revelation, inspiration, illumination, and interpretation.* God makes known the things man otherwise could not know. Divine *inspiration* guarantees the accurate transmission of God’s truth in the right words to convey God’s thoughts. Divine *illumination* lights up the truth for holy people. “Now we have received . . . the spirit which is of God: that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God” (1 Cor. 2:12).

It becomes man’s exceedingly great responsibility to interpret God’s Word in a way that will not confuse the voice of God with the voice of man. “When human error enters, divine truth is obscured.” We have the Word of God in the words of men. One of the most firmly established principles of law in England and America is that a law means exactly what it says, and is to be interpreted and enforced exactly as it reads. This necessitates the need of definite principles of interpretation lest we be dependent on man’s opinions.

I. Interpret Normally or Literally

We approach any other writing in the way men talk, write, and think—according to the primary, usual, normal meaning of the words, and phrases. Romans 16:16 says, “Salute one another with an holy kiss”—very plainly and clearly stated. But today many Mennonites, by their practice, seem to think this verse means to hug each other. The Holy Spirit guided the writers of Scripture into truth and away from error by the use of words. Interpretation is grounded in fact, and facts are expressed in words. Normal, literal interpretation is the only safe check on the imagination of man. Therefore when the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore take

every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context clearly indicate otherwise. God conveyed to us His truth in words when He said, “Ye ought also to wash one another’s feet”; “If a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him”; “If a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her.” We know these words mean what they say. When men figurize and spiritualize whatever they want to, they have started a process that has no end. No part of the Bible is any man’s guess.

II. Interpret According to Context

Note carefully the Scripture that surrounds the passage being studied. To whom is God speaking—an individual, the church, the nation of Israel, Gentiles, or men in general? For example, the Lord explains the word *perfect* (Matthew 5:48) in verses 45-47. Or in Luke 17:21, when Jesus said, “The kingdom of God is within you,” He was speaking to Pharisees. With some checking, we find *within* has the idea of “among.” Thus the King was in their midst.

Context may go beyond chapter divisions. Hebrews 2:1-3 cannot be properly understood without Chapter 1. John 17:53 and 8:1 contrast Jesus’ accommodations with those of the other people. Matthew 17:1-8 gives us a clue to the meaning of 16:28. We have no right to take a Scripture out of the context into which the Lord put it.

III. Interpret in the Light of the Total Scope of the Scripture

The Bible takes us from the Creation to the New Creation. We have the will of God for man set in a historical framework. God reveals Himself—His ways, His doctrines, His plan—in actual situations. He does this primarily through His people, Israel, in the Old Testament, and through His people, the church, in the New Testament.

One of the causes of some of the figurizing and spiritualizing of some clear literal Scriptures is trying to read the body of Christ, the church, into the Old Testa-

ment. True, the Old Testament predicts the coming of the Gentiles to the light. But Paul clearly tells us the revelation concerning the body of Christ “from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God” (Eph. 3:9), but “is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit” (v. 5). In Colossians 1:26, 27 he explains further that this great revelation of truth is “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” To the Romans he said the revelation of this mystery was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest” (16:26). In Matthew 16:18 Jesus said He *will* build His church. The church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ being the chief cornerstone (Eph. 2:20). Paul’s declaration in 1 Corinthians 12:13—“By one Spirit are we all baptized into one body”—points out the necessity of the coming of the Holy Spirit to form the church. The church came into being after Jesus ascended to heaven (Eph. 1:20-23). We must not make the earlier revelation (Old Testament) say all the later revelation (New Testament) says.

IV. God Revealed His Will Progressively

The Old Testament opens with *God*. The New Testament opens with *Christ*. The Old ends with *curse*. The New ends with *grace*. Details of the coming Redeemer grow from Genesis 3:15, on through the Old Testament, until finally we learn He will come out of Bethlehem (Micah 5:2).

The faithful interpreter will give attention to the chronological sequence of events, especially in the Old Testament. The first 11 chapters of Genesis span about one half the time frame of the Old Testament. The end of the Book of Nehemiah (or Esther) complete the other half of the time covered in the Old Testament. Therefore the books of the Old Testament beyond the Book of Esther fit chronologically into the previous books. We can interpret more accurately the message of the Psalms and prophets when we

find their proper place in the chronological sequence of events.

In the New Testament, while the time frame is important, we note the progressive development is more according to *thought*—constructive rather than historical. The “great orderly scheme of advancing doctrine” unfolds in the context of events; persons; churches being established, commended, and rebuked; church problems settled; fundamental eternal principles taught; and church government established. But the Teacher, the Head of the church, is the same Person we listened to in the four Gospels, the Lord Jesus, now working by the Holy Spirit through His apostles and disciples. In interpreting Scripture it is, indeed, important that we place the same authority on the words in the epistles as we place on the words of Jesus in the Gospels. We accept the clear statement of Paul when he says, “The things I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord” (1 Cor. 14:37).

V. Compare Scripture With Scripture

The redemption and restoration of man shines out as the direct and primary thrust of the Bible. God once lived and fellowshiped with man, and He will do so again. This is the goal of God’s revelation of truth. From Genesis 3 to Revelation 22 the Word vibrates with a redemptive, transforming message. This spells harmony. Therefore we need to compare Scripture to interpret accurately in order to maintain that harmony in the way we teach the Word. We refuse to hang a decision on one verse alone when other verses speak to the same subject. For example, for a balanced view of justification we use Paul’s teaching in Romans as well as the teaching of James in Chapter 2. When studying the security of the believer, we use various Scriptures, including John 10, Romans 3, Hebrews 6, 1 Timothy 4, and Hebrews 3.

VI. Interpret in Light of Some Evident Principles

1. *The Law of Full Mention.* When we

consider all the Scriptures on a given word or subject, we can be more sure of the proper interpretation. The subject of *patience* would be a good one to study.

2. *The Law of Recurrence.* Often an event will be mentioned; then following such mention, it will be taken up again with greater explanation. Compare the creation of man in Genesis 1:26, 27 with 2:7, 21, 22. The events of Revelation 16 are taken up in greater detail in Chapters 17, 18, and 19. Keeping this law in mind will help us keep the time sequence clear.

3. *The Law of Single Interpretation.* Every Scripture has one *primary interpretation*. Some Scriptures may have more than one *application*. Many Scriptures have also a prophetic *revelation*. For example, Hosea 11:1, “When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt.” The primary *interpretation* pertains to God calling the Israelites out of Egypt. By way of *application* we can say God calls His people out of a world of sin. The prophetic *revelation* is picked up in Matthew 2:15, referring to Baby Jesus. Be sure to differentiate between *interpretation* and *application*. *Interpretation* is strictly what it means in its setting, not what we might want to *make* it mean.

There are times when the Holy Spirit, through New Testament writers, makes application to the church, of Old Testament prophecies given to Israel. For example, Jeremiah predicts (31:31-34) the Lord making a new covenant with the house of Israel. The writer to the Hebrews makes an application of this prophecy (10:16, 17) to the church. But the application does not fulfill the prophecy or negate the literal fulfillment of it to Israel at some future time. Peter does this also (1 Peter 2:10) when he makes an application, not the fulfillment, of Hosea 1:10.

4. *The Law of Double Reference* (more than one phase of fulfillment). A prophet may speak of a local situation or event and, without clearly indicating it, will describe a distant scene of far greater import. Isaiah 7:10-16 describes a situa-

tion in the days of Ahaz. But verse 14 predicts the Virgin Birth of Christ. Malachi 4:5 illustrates vividly the law of double reference: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord." Jesus, in speaking of John the Baptist (Matthew 17:12), said Elijah is come already. Jesus also told His disciples concerning John the Baptist, "If ye will receive it, this is Elijah which was for to come" (11:14).

But when priests and Levites asked John if he were Elijah, he said, "I am not" (John 1:21). Gabriel harmonized this for us when he said John the Baptist would go before Jesus "in the spirit and power of Elias" (Luke 1:17). Therefore John the Baptist partially fulfilled Malachi 4:5 when he came "in the spirit and power of Elijah." But Jesus' first coming was not the dreadful, fearful day of the Lord. (See Joel 2:1, 2 and Zephaniah 1:14-18 for a Biblical description of "the day of the Lord.") Therefore a completed fulfillment of Elijah's coming seems to be future.

VII. Interpreting Figurative Language

Figurative means "expressing one thing in terms normally denoting another." Jesus is not a literal vine, nor a literal door, nor a literal lamb, even though He is so-called. Is it difficult to tell these are figures? How do you know? Is the meaning clear from the context? Yes! In case of doubt or uncertainty, then what? Always look for a literal meaning before interpreting it as figurative. Does the literal make good sense (instead of "does it fit in with my way of thinking")? If the literal is absurd or inconsistent with other parts of the sentence or with the other things being discussed, then the language is likely figurative. Watch for evidences of figures of speech. When Jesus was speaking of John the Baptist and Elijah, He said, "If ye will receive it." Jesus called Herod a fox; He spoke of straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel; He talked about the mote and beam in the eye—all

of which would be absurd to consider them literal.

Search carefully for Bible interpretations of the figure of speech used. When the Bible interprets its own figure of speech, no person has the right to reinterpret it. Revelation 12:9 and 20:2 interpret the *serpent* as "satan." We err if we reinterpret the serpent to mean something else.

VIII. Interpreting Types, Shadows, Symbols, Allegories, and Parables

1. A *type* must be a true picture of what it represents. It must also be of divine appointment. Only God can ordain the one to typify the other. We should not prove a doctrine from a type unless there is clear New Testament authority. Rather, a type could illustrate a doctrine. Trying to find types in about every incident, event, or person tends to lift Scripture out of its natural and historical setting and put it into the fanciful. Use great care—there are too many possibilities for speculation and error. We can, at least, say there are similarities, such as between Joseph and Christ.

2. A *shadow* is a dim outline or faint representation. The Son-shine of the New Testament did cast some shadows noticeable to the Old Testament. For example, see Colossians 2:17 and Hebrews 10:1.

3. A *symbol* is something that stands for or represents something else. A type always looks to the future. A symbol may represent something of present, past, or future. The bread and juice in the Lord's supper is an example. Some symbols the Lord has interpreted:

Ferocious beasts (Daniel 7, 8)—Wicked, cruel political kings and powers.

Incense (Revelation 5:8)—prayer.

Waters (Revelation 17:15)—peoples, multitudes, nations, tongues.

Ten horns (Revelation 17:12)—ten kings.

Chaste virgin (2 Corinthians 11:2)—true church.

When a symbol is not interpreted, we

need to study carefully the Scriptures which deal with the same symbol. A symbol may represent more than one thing or person—Christ is referred to as a *lion*, and so is Satan as a roaring *lion*. More than one symbol may be used to represent the same thing or person—*Lamb, Lion, Bread, Vine* all represent Christ.

4. An *allegory* is a figurative story describing one thing under the image of another. A few examples: Judges 9:7-15; Isaiah 5:1-7; Galatians 4:22-31. In an allegory the inference is usually clear. But do not allegorize a plain Scripture to make it say what harmonizes with your total interpretation.

5. With *parables* we need to determine the one central truth the parable intends to teach. Then determine how much is interpreted by the Lord Himself. Do not press too much significance into the details. When He interprets a parable, we need to stay by His explanation when we interpret them. “Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye know all parables?” (Mark 4:13).

IX. Interpreting Prophetic Scriptures

Prophecy is that which had not come to pass when it was written. In God’s sight prophecy is as certain as history. Prophecy is accurate and trustworthy. God says in Isaiah 46:11, “I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass.” Fulfilled prophecies provide the clue to God’s method of bringing to pass unfulfilled prophecies. If there is in Scripture one prophecy supernaturally fulfilled literally, then we have no other choice directing us to interpret prophecy any different than the way we interpret, for example, John 13 or 1 Corinthians 11.

Some prophecies seem almost impossible or unbelievable. When Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar he would eat grass like a beast for seven years, human thinking would have declared it unbelievable. But verse 33 declares, “The same hour was the thing fulfilled.” When God told Noah He would destroy all flesh with a flood, what

did God’s prophetic Word mean to Noah? “By faith Noah . . . moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house” (Hebrews 11:7). He believed every word of it because *God had spoken. Faith in God’s prophetic Word resulted in Noah’s stability in a very wicked age.*

1. *The Seriousness of Failing to Believe or of Wrongly Interpreting Prophecy.* Jesus said to the two Jews on the way to Emmaus, “O fools and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken.” Why did they not believe Scriptures like Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53? We are not told. But Jesus had strong words for them because they did not interpret prophecy correctly. How serious was this? They “overthrow the faith of some” (v. 18b). The root of the differences in prophetic interpretation lies in the method of interpreting Scripture. That is the burden of this treatise—how do we handle the holy, unchanging Word of God?

2. *Fulfilled Prophecies Determine the Method of Interpreting Unfulfilled Prophecies.* Prophetic truth harmonizes! This harmony depends on literal fulfillment of all prophecy, not the figurizing of some of them. Fulfilled prophecy is literal in detail: “A bone of him shall not be broken”—John 19:36; Psalm 38:20. Cast lots for his garments—Matthew 27:35; Psalm 22:8. Gave Jesus vinegar to drink—John 19:28-30; Psalm 69:21. *Predictive prophecy calls for literal interpretation.* The Bible has established this rule.

3. *Compare Prophetic Scene With Prophetic Scene.* In relation to the coming of our Lord, compare 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 with Matthew 24:29-31. Note every detail of both scenes. If they are not alike, don’t try to make them alike.

The judgment scenes in the Scriptures make an interesting study. When we carefully study Matthew 25:31-46 with Revelation 20:11-15, we find practically nothing alike. If Matthew 25 teaches one universal, final judgment for all mankind who have lived on the earth, then we must honestly face another question. When a Christian

dies and departs to be with Christ in heaven, his destiny is decided. Must he then leave heaven, join the sheep and goat judgment, and have his destiny determined again? This is one problem of a preconceived idea of one general judgment. Our belief that a saint goes to heaven when he dies makes void a judgment where *all* saints need to be separated from the "goats." John 5:24 says "He that believeth [keeps on believing] on him that sent me hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation [judgment]." Vine defines this word as "the process of investigation, the act of distinguishing and separating." Instead of being judged when he meets Christ, the Christian will be rewarded. Jesus said, "Thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just" (Luke 14:4). No doubt 2 Corinthians 5:10 speaks to this rewarding. Here the word translated "judgment seat" is not the judgment word, but a word meaning "raised place or throne."

4. *Observe Carefully Whether the Prophecy Is Conditional or Unconditional.* This calls for a careful comparison of Scripture with Scripture. In Deuteronomy 28 God predicts and promises many blessings to the people of Israel if they will be obedient. He also predicted a terrible time of trouble and pestilence if they disobeyed. What man did determined what was fulfilled.

When we compare Scripture with Scripture concerning God's covenant with Abraham, we find something different. Use your Bibles for this study. This covenant is spelled out in Genesis 17:1-8. Then even though some of the patriarchs had sinned, God confirmed this covenant to Isaac (Genesis 26:1-4; 50:24). In Psalm 105:8-11 the psalmist considered it to be in effect even though Abraham's seed had disobeyed God for many years. Moses said even if the Jewish people become idolatrous, in the latter days God would not fail Israel or forget His covenant (Deuteronomy 4:25-31). Even though they rejected Jesus, Peter still considered the Jews as

children of the Abrahamic covenant (Acts 3:12, 13, 25, 26). Then finally God's covenant with Abraham included a promise of blessing to all people. Its fulfillment necessitated the coming of the Redeemer. A conditional covenant would have thwarted His coming, since it would have been conditioned on Israel's obedience. Since it is unconditional, we can expect the fulfillment of *all* its promises. Please note Psalm 89:30-34; Jeremiah 31:35-37; Ezekiel 36, 37.

5. *Note if Same Phrase, Theme, or Concept Is Treated Elsewhere.* For example, *day of the Lord, remnant, regathering of Israel.* The messages of the prophets harmonize; we need to find them and note them.

6. *Check Carefully for Interpretation of That Which Is Clearly Figurative.* In the Book of Revelation terms such as *incense, censer, seven-headed beast with ten horns, etc.*—go to the Old Testament for clues when they are not interpreted in Revelation.

7. *Do Not Force an Interpretation When Not Sure.* More light may come later. At times we may need to say, "I don't know." One example would be the two witnesses of Revelation 11; or the exact sequence of prophetic events.

8. *Be Consistent in Interpretation.* Two examples will suffice. In Revelation 20:8, *nations* (v. 3) would mean the same thing. We could not consistently say that *nations* in v. 3 refers to the church.

Then, we take literally the judgments pronounced upon the Jewish people because of disobedience. Consistency requires us likewise to apply the promises of blessing to the same Jewish people when they seek the Lord. Many times the judgments pronounced upon them and the blessings promised to them are in the same Scriptural context. How dare we interpret the one to be for Israel and the other for the church? Why do some interpreters seem to take liberties with the prophetic Scriptures which they would not take with the other Scripture? Remember, the warning given in Revelation 22:18, 19

is in context of prophetic Scriptures. Isn't that interesting and sobering?

X. Interpreting Scriptural Promises

The little song, "Every Promise in the Book Is Mine," is not true in the strictest sense. When Paul was witnessing in Athens, the Lord promised that no one would hurt him (Acts 18:10), a special promise to Paul for in that city. It would be misinterpreting this verse to say that we will never be hurt when witnessing for the Lord. "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28) is an example of a universal promise. James 4:8 gives a conditional promise: "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you." The interpreter needs to give careful attention as to whom the promise is given. Comparing with other Scriptural promises on the same subject will lend more light on the exact meaning.

Finally:

1. *Faith.* "Through faith we understand . . ." (Hebrews 11:3). Thus we understand the Creation account in the first book of the Bible. In the same way we understand the things to come in the last book of the Bible, as well as all that lies in between. Jesus said to Martha, "If thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see" (John 11:40). In 1 Timothy 4:3 Paul speaks of "them which believe and know the truth." Instead of saying, "I don't understand it," we should first say, "Do I believe it?" With faith will come more understanding.

2. *Prayer.* "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law" (Psalm 119:18). The Lord wants us to understand His Word properly. He promised Jeremiah (33:3)—"Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not."

3. *Holy Spirit Guidance.* "He will guide you into all truth." This will depend, of course, on our openness to the truth and our willingness to lay aside our preconceived ideas. "We have received . . . the spirit which is of God; that we might know

the things that are freely given to us of God" (1 Cor. 2:12).

4. *Application.* We must give attention to the Word with intention to obey. "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord" (Hosea 6:3). Proverbs 2:1, 5 give us a tremendous conditional promise: "If thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee . . . Then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God."

Christ was both human and divine. How likewise the Scriptures bear the marks of the human and the divine. Christ was free from sin. Likewise the Scriptures are free from error.

"Thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name" (Psalm 138:2). ■

FOOTNOTE

1. Robert Shank in *Until*.

JOHANN KEPLER . . . cont'd.

of his 59th birthday. His grave was later destroyed by the ravages of the Thirty Years' War.

Thanks to the work of Johann Kepler our knowledge of the heavens has been transformed from mere geometrical shapes to dynamical astronomy involving physical force. Kepler clarified for us how the solar system is organized in space.

"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out through all the earth. And their words to the end of the world. In them He has set a tabernacle for the sun, which is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoices like a strong man to run its race. Its rising is from one end of heaven, and its circuit to the other end; and there is nothing hidden from its heat" (Psalm 19:1-6)

—Gail L. Emerson

Interpretation With Appreciation

by Aaron Lapp

One of the most critical issues for the church is the method of Biblical interpretation. The power, beauty, and life-changing effect of the Word of God is dependent on a faithful interpretation.

A literal interpretation is fine for most people in regard to salvation. Salvation is God's gift to us; that which God does for us. The Bible is put at risk for faulty interpretation when it speaks to directing our lives. The response to God's Word concerning what He wants us to do is where some Christians use various methods of interpretation.

We herewith introduce five methods of Bible interpretation:

1. The Personal Expression Method

Unique benefits are claimed based on personal discovery. One's experience becomes the line of understanding of any chosen Scripture, usually randomly selected. How one experiences suitable Scriptures is based on a non-threatening latitude of conduct. Such judge the Scriptures by their favored experiences rather than being judged by it. Personal preference is celebrated. A free lifestyle is the offspring. The conclusive evidence by experience is the clincher.

2. The Historical Method

This method has become a favorite of some specialists. For them, basing Bible interpretation on historical writings gives the Bible its ultimate authority.

Men of the past, including the Anabaptists, were also flesh and blood mortals. Their views are interesting, and can be helpful. Let's remember that when we interpret what they interpreted, we already have a secondhand interpretation. Not all such secondhand

interpreters agree on what the Anabaptists wrote!

3. The Allegorical Method

An allegory is "the description of one thing under the image of another; a story in which people, things, and happenings have a hidden or symbolic meaning." The authentic meaning is not conveyed by the actual words. Communication of such ideas can only be given by those who have sufficient orientation.

The allegorical method takes one from the simple to the complex. Those portions of the Bible that are chosen to be understood allegorically then become abandoned or cause confusion. The conclusions drawn do not agree with others who use this method of interpretation.

4. The Unity Method

This approach draws together everybody's thoughts on the matter. No one should be left out or marginalized in expressing his view or preference.

"What do you think this passage is trying to say?" is the question asked of the church. Finding the level of unity on the interpretation usually requires a compromising effort by the body. Pluralism is the happy result that puts the parameter out as far as possible. In that case, God's Word speaks for us rather than to us. But the important thing, beyond all else, is that we can all agree.

5. The Literal Method

The literal view gives equal value to the words written according to the connotation of the Word. Predictable and fixed grammatical rules provide for a reasonable and standard measure of

understanding and agreement. It allows the Bible to say what it says. The Bible is never *trying* to say its message. It simply and explicitly says it and sometimes *we are trying* to understand it.

Some people seem to be satisfied with one of the first four methods or a combination of all five methods. The first four methods have given rise to a new generation of priests in church leadership. The priestly class has brought about a “feel goodism” brand of Christianity that fills churches with backslapping and handclapping people, but precious few for authentic Christian living and the Master’s field of service.

What is needed is for prophets to rise and declare, “Thus saith the Lord!” The prophetic message falls on hard times when the Bible is proclaimed in something other than literal terms.

The basis for a literal interpretation of Scripture is founded on the very meaning of letters and literature and their “brother” counterparts. Letters make up words, words make up sentences, sentences make up paragraphs, paragraphs make up chapters, and chapters make up books, of which the Bible is one.

The following is a short course in the meaning of the word *literature* and its related words.

Letter = Latin is *littera*, from which we have literature.

Literature = Latin is *litteratura*, the broad range of things written.

Literate = Latin is *litteratus*, one who is able to read and write.

Literary = Latin is *litterarius*, having to do with literature and/or books.

Literal = Latin is *litteralis*. 1. following or representing the exact words of the original; word-for-word as in literal translation. 2. habitually interpreting statements or words according to their actual denotation. 3. real; not going beyond the actual facts; accurate; unvarnished (the literal truth).

Literally = in a literal manner or

sense; word-for-word; not imaginatively or figuratively.

The message (God’s Word) has been given by inspiration of God. The question often is posed, “How shall God’s message be understood?” We agree that “holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” We readily concur that “no Scripture is of any private interpretation.” We all can wholeheartedly accept the Bible as coming from God for man. Unitedly believing is much easier than unitedly obeying.

For many centuries after the early church, the Bible was not taken seriously. It was handled by the ecclesiastical experts in official cathedral rituals. Through the monks in monastery enclaves, the Word of God was meticulously copied and, in some instances, miraculously preserved. The monks had chosen a lifetime commitment in their cloistered monasteries. Conscientiously and unhurried, they carefully copied and recopied the Word of God, word for word.

For generations, commoners were held back by the Catholic Church. The light of faith in Christ was very dim, faintly flickering. The Catholic Church was riddled with allegories. For example, the church’s statues were symbolic; their communion claimed to be a transubstantiation of Christ, in which the bread and wine turned into the actual body and blood of Christ when it was blessed by the priest. The church claimed the infallibility of the Pope, and taught that the Virgin Mary is sinless because she bore the Holy Christ Child, and as such she is the Intercessor for Catholics. The church is Israel, Catholics say. Proper prayers for the dead can release their souls from purgatory. Truly allegorical—truly false.

The Reformation in the 1520s picked up speed when Martin Luther translated the Bible into German. Germanic blood—strong, opinionated blood—flowed in his being and in his followers.

Thousands could read the Bible in their own language for the very first time. This movement was further propelled by the new and exciting discovery of spiritual concepts, understood by a literal view of Scripture. People took it to mean what it said. However, their focus was on the elements of personal salvation and its attendant and blessed assurance.

The Anabaptist movement in the 1620s (100 years later) was also based on the genius of a literal understanding of God's Word. Their literal faith was based on a literal interpretation of salvation by faith, baptism for believers only, nonresistance, non-swearing of oaths, non-political involvement and an unpretentious lifestyle. The nucleus of their belief was a literal interpretation of Scripture, including the broad doctrinal spectrum as it relates to Christian living, not only being saved by faith. Their dynamism came from an honest study of the Bible, unvarnished in its applications. By it they lived, and by it they died.

Protestants have long used the allegorical approach for things that don't generally fit their preferences and presuppositions. The allegorical method is moveable and transitory. It is subject to variations according to desired outcomes. It is possible to shift conclusions because the interpretations can be more easily based on prevailing opinions. Eventually, the allegorical system lends itself quite well, thank you, to church politics. The prevailing group consensus and the track of interpretation can both move rather easily toward one another. It is only a matter of time until they become one.

While politics move according to the wishes of the people, principle is fixed and established. Politics vacillate and are unpredictable; principles are stable and predictable. The principles of Scripture are based on a solid, divine inspiration with authority authenticated by

God Himself. Literal interpretation allows a stability and continuity of faith and practice consistent with the godly persons of both the Old Testament and the New Testament and the span of time since. The revelation that God gave with words conclusively settles the question of what God's will is for us today, or else it is never settled at all! Statistics have shown that among Christians today, 95% agree on what the Bible says; sadly, only 65% agree on what the Bible means, but pathetically, an embarrassingly small percentage agree on how it should be lived.

The allegorical interpretation takes one from the simple to the complex. The literal interpretation takes the believer from the complex to the simple. Those texts which at the time are too hard to be understood, do not on that account need to be despised or rejected. A literal faith accepts them nonetheless, because the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. "A simple man of faith can see more on his knees than a philosopher can see on his tiptoes."

Some Bible preachers take people from the simple Word of God to a complex interpretation of certain texts. Then people say he is "deep" in the Scriptures. Actually, he is shallow. When hearers are taken from the complex to the simple, then you have someone in reality teaching with spiritual depth. By it the hearer is given enlightenment in the mind and enlargement of heart which has increased his spiritual capacities. The whole of Scripture lends itself to that approach, being duly authorized for it by the Holy Spirit. Bible truth is either held high as a doctrinal base or it floats as a theoretical raft inconspicuously and out of sight on the sea of relativism.

Thank God, the Bible can be heard and believed, obeyed and received by the common man. It is given for that purpose with the literary value of common words in a standard value of interpretation. We

all share the same understanding 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, throughly furnished unto all good works.” These classic verses assume a distinct directness in the Scriptures that calls on the reader to recognize applicable concepts stated in forthright terms. Man’s carnality can cause taking the simple and direct commands and placing them in an allegorical personal preference fog and thus making them appear either optional, historical, or just plain impractical.

The literal interpretation of Scripture coincides with holding forth the Bible in a timelessness that is applicable for the whole of the church age. The literal view places all Scripture into a frame of profit for all those who are willing to receive it as given.

The various approaches to interpretation have in some cases reached a point in which some ask, “Well, what difference does it make?” The difference it makes is not a mere matter of giving a mental assent to conflicting philosophical approaches. Some people may subscribe to a certain view because of the company in which it puts them. Some others may decide on a composite of approaches according to personal preferences.

Having more than one method of interpretation actually results in a greater variable of the application of Scripture. The latitude in Bible application is where the greater disagreements and divisions happen in the churches. There will always be differences of application. When, besides that, there are differences in our method of interpretation, the gap tends to widen even more in the area of application. When some of the Bible is taken literally and some is viewed allegorically, a mix of interpretation results. That mix can be a different concoction for various people, or for the next generation. The

applications coming out of that mix may, at some point in time, be a mix without a fix.

There has been a general peaceful co-existence in conservative churches over the last generation or two on the interpretation question. Considering the disparity of views, we may wish to congratulate ourselves for how well we get along. On the other hand, we can hardly comprehend the additional unity we would experience if the plain churches would all subscribe to one method of interpretation for the whole of God’s marvelous revelation, to which we all claim to be faithful, the Holy Bible.

It would be helpful to understand that when the Bible uses symbols, we literally interpret them as symbols. Some mock God’s Word by taking obvious symbols and conjecturing some fallacy out of it to show the ridiculous side of literalism. No, symbols need to be taught as symbols, similes as similes, hyperbole as hyperbole, metaphors as metaphors. If we can sincerely and honestly do that, much of the objection to a literal interpretation would vanish.

Our appreciation of God’s Holy Word should rise with a high view of Scripture. The Bible message is self-authenticating as His will for the full extent of the church age. God’s Son gave witness to the same and God by the Holy Spirit continues to bear testimony to honest hearts.

Our appreciation for God’s Word rises in thanksgiving to God for the clarity of His Word and that it is given with words that auger toward a simple and understandable interpretation. God be praised that He says what He means, and means what He says, for if God in heaven doesn’t mean what He says, who on earth will be able to say what He does mean?

Our appreciation rises in praise to God that the literal interpretation of the Bible is accessible to the common man, reasonable to common sense, and conducive for all in the common faith. ■

Preserving the Words of God

by Henry M. Morris

There is a wonderful promise found in one of David's psalms, as follows:

"The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever" (Psalm 12:6, 7).

These pure words of God were conveyed to men through David and Moses and Paul and the other authors of the books of the Bible. But that was a long time ago, and the original manuscripts are apparently long gone, so just *how* did the Lord intend to preserve those words from that generation *forever*?

Furthermore, He frequently issued serious warnings against changing any of these words. For example, Moses wrote:

"Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you" (Deuteronomy 4:2).

Many years later, in the Proverbs God inserted a further warning:

"Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him. Add thou not unto His words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar" (Proverbs 30:5, 6).

At the very end of the Bible, of course, is found the extremely grave warning through Christ's beloved disciple John:

"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: 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" (Revelation 22:18, 19).

God was indeed dead serious when He

assured David (and all of us!) that He would preserve His pure words forever! Remember also that the Lord Jesus Himself said:

"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" (Matthew 5:18).

And He also insisted that *"the scripture cannot be broken"* (John 10:35).

We believe our Bible comprises these divine words as they have come down to us. However, the problem is that none of these original prophetic writings (the so-called "autographs") are still available, and no one can really verify that any of the handwritten copies we now have are exactly as originally written.

The transmission through many centuries of the books of the Bible is a fascinating saga of God's providential care of His words. The Old Testament writings were given first in Hebrew, then meticulously copied and recopied by many scribes, finally to be edited into their present form by the Masoretes, all before the invention of the printing press.

The New Testament books were first written in the so-called Koine Greek. These also, originally written by Paul, Peter, and other apostles, were soon being copied and circulated all over the Christian world. It was not surprising that many variations (usually—but not always—very minor) crept into these copies. Also, both Old and New Testament books began to be translated and circulated in other languages—Latin, Syrian, Coptic, etc.—and these also had variations. All in all, however, the vast majority were really intended to be faithful copies and/or translations of the originals. Since there are several thousand of these hand-copied manuscripts of all or parts of the

Bible still extant, various textual scholars have been able to reproduce with considerable accuracy the original text of both the Hebrew and Greek portions of the Bible. There are still, however, a fair number of variations even in these different collations. Furthermore, the Bible now has also been translated into thousands of different modern languages.

So how do we know which one—if any—contains the exact words which God promised to preserve?

As far as our English language is concerned, it did not even exist as such at the times the Bible books were being written. However, the Bible or portions of it were available in the many pre-English languages in use in England very soon after the Roman conquest. The development of modern English gradually took place from these earlier tongues and by the time of our familiar King James Authorized Translation (1611), it was very much like today's English.

In fact, it is interesting to note that the so-called Bishop's Bible, which preceded the King James and was widely used for many years before the latter, contained language much more like today's English than did the later King James itself.¹ The "learned men" selected by King James to produce the Authorized Version, were specifically instructed to produce a version which would not only be literally accurate but would also "sing" with poetic prose which would be easier to memorize and have a more powerful spiritual impact. That they were notably successful in these efforts has been proved by almost four centuries of widespread acceptance and use throughout the English-speaking world.

But all translations, including even the King James are imperfect. None of these scholars were quite like the "holy men of God" who were supernaturally endowed in various ways to write the original autographs and who therefore "spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Peter 1:21). At least the Bible nowhere says they would be so endowed and careful evalua-

tion of each modern translation surely confirms that they are all less than perfect.

I have some forty or so translations myself and profit by studying them, but am personally satisfied that the old King James is still the most reliable and most nearly literally accurate, as well as the most beautiful and spiritually powerful. I could wish it were still accepted as the standard.

But it is definitely not perfect. There are a number of points where its translation could have been better—at least in my judgment.²

But did not God say that He would preserve all His pure words, and do so forever? If so, many would ask, Where is it? Where can we read these perfectly preserved words?

Well, God has clearly answered this good question! "*For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven*" (Psalm 119:89). This great affirmation is surely one of the key verses of the Bible—right at the middle of its longest chapter, that amazing psalm of 176 verses, with its 176 affirmations extolling the Holy Scriptures.

God is undoubtedly keeping all His pure words intact in heaven. Just possibly the original manuscripts—long vanished from the earth—are being kept in the Ark of God's Covenant, like the original tables of the law were kept while the Ark was in the wilderness tabernacle (Hebrews 9:4).

That Ark, incidentally also has—like the autographs—seemingly vanished from the earth. When Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Solomon's Temple, he carried all its treasures away to Babylon (2 Chronicles 36:18), but these evidently did not include its most valuable treasure, the Ark of the Covenant.

I believe that the Ark of God's Covenant (like Elijah) was taken by angels direct to heaven for safekeeping, wherein perhaps the divine originals—if not the earthly transcriptions—could be kept "*for ever settled in heaven.*" When one is a "naive literalist" like myself, he cannot help but note that John actually *saw* in

the heavenly temple “*the ark of his testament*” (Revelation 11:19), so perhaps it is really there.

In any case, God’s Word is there in heaven preserved in its entirety somewhere. Even though textual scholars may not yet have been able to reproduce all the original autographs word perfect, they have been able to come very close by analyzing the thousands of hand copies left by the copyists here on Earth. Conservative scholars have made a strong case that the Masoretic Hebrew text and the Greek Textus Receptus (or something very similar) are so close to the originals that we can use any literal translation based on them (such as the King James) with confidence that it is essentially the actual written Word of God, while yet allowing the possibility here and there of occasional copyist errors or inadequate translations—which can often be resolved and corrected by further study.

The Scriptures also promise that, in the

future, God will “*turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent*” (Zephaniah 3:9). Whether this “pure language” will be Hebrew or the language of Adam or something else (English?), we don’t know.

Whatever it is, we shall surely at that time have available the “forever settled” Word of God in *that* language, so that all who are there in that wonderful coming age can then indeed “*call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent.*” ■

Endnotes

1. Gail Riplinger, *In Awe of Thy Word*, (A. V. Publications Corp., 2003), pp. 206-224.
2. For example, the KJV translates the Hebrew *male* in Genesis 1:28 as “replenish” instead of its normal meaning “fill,” thus allowing compromisers to accept pre-Adamites, the geological ages, and even evolution. There are a number of such unfortunate word choices, but these are rare.
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Interpreting the Bible

by James F. Myer

A. HOW DO WE (I) INDIVIDUALLY AND CORPORATELY USE AND INTERPRET THE BIBLE?

I have added an “I” (in parentheses) to the subject that was given to me, because I am attempting to speak out of my own experience in using and interpreting the Bible. I am not claiming to speak for everyone else in this message. It is not that I claim to know everything there is to know about the subject, or that what I say will settle these matters once and for all. But neither do I expect to apologize for what I believe and what have become foundational pillars that undergird my faith.

Biblical interpretation (or hermeneutics) has to do with how we arrive at the *meaning* of Scripture. It is likely *this*

issue, as much as anything else that led to the beginnings of the Brethren movement nearly 300 years ago. Alexander Mack and his group came to some different conclusions about what was the meaning of certain passages of Scripture when compared to what was being said by other religious groups. Among some unique Brethren conclusions are these—that we should actually wash each other’s feet during communion; that we consider the Lord’s Supper to be a fellowship meal rather than just the bread and cup communion; and that we have members of the same gender actually kiss each other in what is called the “holy kiss.”

All of my early influences in the Church of the Brethren suggested that

the Bible is the Word of God. All the Sunday school lessons, all the Bible study sessions, and all the sermons I heard—were presented with the full belief that God speaks through the written Word, and the Bible is the book of God’s truth. It was only after I was called to the Christian ministry at age 22, and began to take the *Reading Course* for ministry training, that I became exposed to other ideas. The benefit of the *Reading Course* was that it opened my eyes to try and carefully discern what can be some dangerous methods of biblical interpretation.

Whenever we read, study, and proceed to teach God’s Word, some interpretation is required. In Nehemiah 8:8 we read, “So they read in the book of the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.” The meaning of Scripture requires a correct understanding of words and phrases. Since language and verbal expression is gradually evolving, sometimes we need to be aware of how certain expressions were understood years ago. Here is where the use of modern translations and paraphrases and Bible dictionaries and commentaries, etc., can be helpful.

An example of how various meanings can be taken out of one sentence—can be illustrated this way: A husband comes home from his job and while eating the evening meal which his wife has made, he asks, “Where did you get this meat?” He could have a number of things in mind by asking the question: “The meat tastes good”; or, “The meat tastes bad.” He may be wondering if it was cheap or expensive. He could be wondering if she bought it at the new store which just opened, or at the one they’ve been buying from for years. Sometimes simple words can be understood in a multiple number of ways.

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B. WHAT ARE SOME PRINCIPLES THAT GUIDE MY USE AND INTERPRETATION OF THE BIBLE?

1. I try and read from the Bible everyday.

I am an early riser (about 5:30 a.m.) and my Bible reading and personal prayers are usually over by 6:00 a.m. Then my wife and I read a portion of the Bible together at breakfast time and we kneel together and take turns praying. This practice of family worship was firmly implanted in my mind when growing up in my parents’ home where the family altar was as regular as eating breakfast. So, first of all, I use the Bible by reading it regularly.

2. I accept the authority, inspiration, and dependability of the Bible.

By “authority” I mean that God’s Word is forever settled in heaven (Psalm 119:89). In Psalm 119, there are 176 verses, which make it the longest chapter in the Bible, and all but three of the verses make a reference in one way or another to God’s Word. The inspiration of the Bible is taught in 2 Timothy 3:16 where we read that “all scripture is given by inspiration of God.” We are also taught in the Word that “no prophecy of scripture is by any private interpretation . . . holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:20, 21). God used human writers who were under an unusual level of divine guidance. They were not freelance writers. And they didn’t need to have a committee meeting to plan the project.

The approximately 40 different writers lived over a 1600-year period and avoided giving misinformation, wrong prophecies, and other misgivings—because the Holy Spirit was guiding the whole process through their lives. God the Holy Spirit “breathed” the Word into their minds. God’s Word is dependable. In Revelation 22:18, 19, strong counsel is given against subtracting from or adding to this book.

SWORD AND TRUMPET

Since God's Word is settled in heaven, we have no right to change it. I accept the Bible's accuracy and its information even when I don't completely understand it.

3. I try and let the Bible speak plainly to me "just as it reads."

It is a process by which I try and allow God to impose the meaning of the Word on me, rather than my imposing my understanding on God. Whenever we read a recipe, or the written assignment from a professor, we are obligated to live by our understanding of those words. Most people learn to be very literal when they read cookbooks. Students are supposed to be literalists when fulfilling a written assignment. We are not free to do anything we want to with the actual words of Scripture, if we want to be faithful with God's Word. Unless the text or context suggests something else, I accept the Bible in a very literal way.

4. I try and study a text with the context and cultural background in mind.

We can read in the Bible that Judas "went out and hanged himself"; at another place, "Go and do thou likewise"; and still another, "What thou doest do quickly!" No one would accept that manner of stringing isolated texts together to form what would be a ridiculous conclusion. I've used a number of different types of preaching, but my preference is to give an expository message on a *passage of Scripture* rather than using a subject and single verse texts. This tends to force me to do more background and analysis, and see the information that nestles close by; otherwise, I may focus only on a single isolated text. The Bible is its own best commentary. We need to see how an isolated text relates to what the rest of the Bible says on the subject. One caution is that the Bible student can get so carried away with all kinds of contextual and cultural considerations, that the central force of the actual text is lost.

5. I try and notice rules of grammar such as figures of speech.

The Bible is full of real-life situation stories. Many of them actually happened—others are used as parables, illustrations, or examples. When Jesus called Herod a "fox" in Luke 13:32, surely He was not meaning that Herod was actually a furry creature that walked on four legs and had a bushy tail. He wanted to use graphic language to convey that anyone who is sly enough to steal his brother's wife has some of the characteristics of a fox. This is a figure of speech known as a metaphor, in which an object will be called by a term which it resembles. Another example is seen where Jesus said, "I am the vine, you are the branches" (John 15:5). There are hyperboles which are planned exaggerations for effect. There are parables, allegories, and euphemisms. Being aware that any of these can be present at various places in the Bible, keeps us from being "wooden literalists" (as dumb as fence posts)—taking everything in a strictly literal sense.

6. I understand both the Old and New Testaments to constitute a unity of truth that represents a progression of divine revelation.

The high-water mark of God's self disclosure is not in the Old Testament. It is in the coming of God's one and only Son, Jesus Christ. So, the Bible sets forth a movement of God, with the initiative coming from God, and not from humans. God brings us up through the theological infancy of the Old Testament to the maturity of the New Testament. This is why the Brethren have historically said the New Testament is our only rule of faith and practice. The Old Testament speaks in types and shadows; the New Testament gives their substance. The Old Testament contains prophecies; the New Testament records their fulfillment. The Old Testament is the schoolroom; the New Testament represents the graduation. Since

Jesus is the high-water mark of God's revelation, we should try to understand the Old Testament through the eyes of Jesus and what He said about it. This is not to suggest that the words of Jesus are on a higher level of inspiration than the other New Testament writers. Jesus simply did not address everything. Some was left for others to address.

7. *I seek to study the Bible with the intent to obey it.*

There is a connection between what I've done with obeying past understandings and how much light I'll be given in the future. There is a saying that "light obeyed increases light; light rejected brings night." In John 7:17, Jesus said, "If any one wants to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine." Here, a willingness to do precedes greater knowing. In 1 Corinthians 3, Paul clearly says it is impossible for the carnal mind to understand the things of God. When someone is seen to take an adamant stand against the very obvious, plain meaning of a text, it raises the possibility that such a person is in need of a new birth experience, and a consequent infilling of the Holy Spirit to enable divine understanding to take place. I personally really desire to be taught by the Holy Spirit, and want Him to correct me whenever my carnal nature gets in the way of proper divine understanding.

8. *I wish to be open to be taught by a wide range of voices when they give evidence of having a high view of Scripture.*

Some of these will be lay people without any formal training in biblical interpretation—people who can see practical implications in applying the Bible. Some will be people highly trained in a study of original languages and in ancient history. Others will be those who have sharpened their skills in expository delivery. In other words, I desire to be taught by a wide community of believers who have dis-

played a respectful and devotional approach to Bible study. I want some room for personally confessing to wrong conclusions and some time to pick up the pieces that come from forgiveness—and then move on.

These eight guidelines constitute most of the broad strokes of my own discipline in using and interpreting the Bible. Many smaller pieces could be added.

During the Annual Conference debate on homosexuality in 2002, a speech was given by Warren Kissinger who worked for many years in the archives in Washington, D.C., and was at one time the editor of the journal *Brethren Life and Thought*. His speech in essence (as I recall it) went something like this: Years ago Brethren found biblical texts that taught against women serving in the pastoral ministry, but we found a way around that. Then we found texts that taught against the remarriage of divorced persons, but we found a way around that. Now we are facing scriptural texts that teach against homosexual practice. In light of what we've done with a number of other biblical texts, we really shouldn't have any trouble working around these also. Is this an example of Brethren biblical interpretation in disarray? Have we modern-day Brethren given ourselves too much liberty in handling the Word of God? When we find something in the Bible that we don't like, do we proceed to find a way around it rather than adjusting ourselves to its implications?

Years ago someone was critical of his straightforward preaching, and said to Billy Sunday, "You rub the fur the wrong way." Billy's answer was, "Well—let the cat turn around." Let's consider what needs to be turned around in order to again have unity in how we use and interpret the Bible. ■

The above message was delivered at a conference of Brethren leaders held at Kokomo, Indiana, in 2003.

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The Doctrine of Inspiration and Inerrancy

by Bobby Hayes

Introduction

Many of the major denominations that for centuries have held to full inerrancy and inspiration of Scripture, have already or are now abandoning their position. Many schools, whose founders valiantly defended inerrancy, have caved in under academic pressure and now allow their professors to teach the ideas of higher and historical criticism. Although many Bible teachers and professors attempt to preserve belief in the doctrine, they find themselves up against not only a culture that is hostile to such a belief, but also growing disbelief from their own congregations and students. James Draper writes:

There are people among us today, teaching in our institutions, laboring in our denominations, pastoring in our churches, who have not departed all that far from classic biblical doctrine. They still believe that Jesus is God. They still believe in the bodily resurrection of Christ. They still believe in the virgin birth. But, they do not believe that everything in Scripture is necessarily accurate and without error. They have started over the ledge.

Today the Word of God is under attack more than at any time in the history of the church. In 1984, in his book *The Great Evangelical Disaster*, Dr. Francis Schaeffer wrote:

Holding to a strong view of Scripture or not holding to it is the watershed of the evangelical world. The first direction in which we must face is to say most lovingly but clearly: evangelicalism is not consistently evangelical *unless there is a line drawn* between those who take a full view of Scripture and those who do not.

The bottom line is, if Scripture cannot be trusted in some areas, it cannot be trusted in any area. Once full inspiration is denied, man determines what is inspired and what is not. Once there is a “crack in the dam” in our belief in full inspiration,

the flood is imminent. Dr. Schaeffer understood that once the flood begins,

. . . there is no end . . . The Bible is made to say only that which echoes the surrounding culture at our moment of history. *The Bible is bent to the culture instead of the Bible judging our society and culture.*

Our belief in inspiration and inerrancy has a very practical effect on our daily life. As Dr. Schaeffer states, “. . . compromising the full authority of Scripture eventually affects what it means to be a Christian theologically and how we live in the full spectrum of human life.” With so much at stake, we must be very clear on what the Scriptures themselves teach about inspiration and inerrancy. Why is inerrancy so questioned today, when held in such high esteem for almost eighteen hundred years? What did the early church fathers and the apostles say about inerrancy? Does the loss of belief in inerrancy make a difference, or is it a minor doctrine not worth debate? The answers to these questions will support the importance of the doctrine of inerrancy and inspiration.

Definitions

Norman Geisler and William Nix give us a good working definition of inspiration in their excellent book *A General Introduction to the Bible*. They state, “Inspiration is that mysterious process by which the divine causality [God] worked through the human prophets without destroying their individual personalities and styles to produce divinely authoritative and inerrant writings,” and Young writes:

By this word [inspiration] we mean that the Scriptures possess the quality of freedom from error. They are exempt from the liability to mistake, incapable of error. In all their teachings they are in perfect accord with the truth.

Paul D. Feinberg provides a solid

definition of the evangelical view of inerrancy. He states, "Inerrancy is the view that when all the facts become known, they will demonstrate that the Bible in its original autographs and correctly interpreted is entirely true and never false in all it affirms, whether that relates to doctrine or ethics or to the social, physical, or life sciences."

Thus, in believing that the Bible is inspired and inerrant, we hold that God divinely guided the apostles and prophets to write down exactly what He wanted them to, and that the Scriptures are totally without error and accurate. Evangelicals have historically held to this view and it is often stated as a belief in *verbal* (the very words, not just thoughts and ideas), *plenary* (equally to every part of the Scriptures) *inspiration*. It should be stated, though, that only the original documents (hereafter referred to as autographs) are free from error. Geisler and Nix sum up the view as held by the church throughout the centuries. They write:

Thus, the orthodox doctrine that the Bible is the infallible, inerrant Word of God in its original manuscripts has maintained itself from the first century to the present. This position holds that the Bible is without error in everything that it affirms. Indeed, according to the traditional teachings of the Christian church, what the Bible says, God Himself says. That includes all matters of history, science, and any other matter on which it touches. Any results of higher criticism that are contrary to this teaching are incompatible with the traditional doctrine of the inspiration and authority of Scripture as it has been held throughout church history. Being at variance with the traditional teaching of the Christian church in its broadest context, such contrary views of Scripture are actually unorthodox.

Full and Limited Inerrancy

We have reached a point in the history of evangelicalism at which qualifying adjectives must be added to the term *inerrant* in order to communicate what is believed. Most conservative evangelicals now must use the term *full inerrancy*, which communicates the belief that all

subject matter is inspired and correct. Certainly things in Scripture may confuse us, and we may have difficulties understanding some texts, but we know the problem lies within us—the interpreter—and not with what we are interpreting.

More and more "evangelicals," however, hold to the belief of *limited inerrancy*. The term *limited inerrancy* means that the Bible, when speaking of matters of faith and practice (i.e., salvation, principles relating to the Christian life, etc.) is free from error. But in matters of sciences, history, or biography are involved it can be supposed that there are mistakes. While God inspired the writers in matters of salvation and living for Christ, He left them on their own when it came to other matters. Characteristic beliefs associated with *limited inerrancy* are a dual authorship of Isaiah; the book of Jonah is a novel rather than historical fact; the book of Daniel was written around 150 BC instead of 536 BC; Adam and Eve are not historical figures, but figures meant to reveal spiritual truths.

Implications of the Two Views

Plenary inspiration, defined above as full inspiration, tells us two things. First, every book of the Bible is equally inspired. God did not put forth more inspiration in John than He did in 2 Chronicles. Each book is important for the believer, and each must be given study and attention. Second, the whole Bible is the result of divine inspiration. One cannot pick and choose what is inspired. Inspiration applies to all Scripture and we can rely on all information contained in the Bible. Such beliefs naturally lead to the doctrine of inerrancy, if God inspired the whole Bible and God cannot make mistakes, then the Bible has no mistakes. We can confidently base our lives on the principles of Scripture knowing they are objectively true.

On the other hand, the liberal interpreter has a problem. If only the ideas of Scripture are inspired, then how can he trust what he reads? It is illogical to assume that the God, who is able to

inspire the ideas, is not able to inspire the words. When we can't trust the very words, we are led to doubt and confusion. The liberal is not able to trust what he reads because there is no absolute truth. As Schaeffer concludes:

The Bible is bent to the culture instead of the Bible judging our society and culture.

Unfortunately, the liberal view increasingly is infecting the church. Pastors, influenced by liberal seminary professors, are departing from the doctrine of full inerrancy. Thus, the tolerance of seminary professors who hold to limited inerrancy causes a trickle-down effect. The infection goes from liberal seminary professor, to tainted pastor, to the laymen in the pew.

If we do not believe that the Word that we are studying is reliable, then how can it produce growth? Why then would the Bible admonish us to trust in the Word, if it were fallible and not a trustworthy source on which to base our life and future hope? Yet the Psalmist confidently stated:

How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of the scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law he meditates day and night. He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither; and in whatever he does, he prospers (Psalm 1:1-3).

And Paul wrote: "All Scripture is inspired by God and **profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness**; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16, 17).

And again, "For whatever was written in earlier times was written **for our instruction**, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Rom. 15:4).

We would not be able to "delight in the law of the Lord" if we were continually questioning whether we could trust it. The liberal is put in such a position. He must

decide what is fallible and what is infallible. When he decides what is fallible, he must decide to what extent it is fallible. Much time is spent trying to find the errors instead of enjoying the whole truth. For the limited inerrancy adherent, Scripture is held at the mercy of the interpreter.

But for those holding to full inspiration, the rules of interpretation assume that each word is inspired and retains the meaning it held in the culture and the historical context in which it was written. In this way, we can determine with a high degree of accuracy the meaning of God's Word. However, the liberal has abandoned these rules of interpretation since to him the *words* are not inspired, simply *the ideas*.

What Caused Doubt to Creep In?

The view of limited inerrancy arose from liberal views of Scripture associated with the historical-critical approach to Scripture. Historical-critical interpretation in and of itself is not bad. It is an intelligent, research-oriented approach to the determination of Scripture. Many of the scholars who employed this method held an anti-supernatural bias.

The seeds of the historical-critical approach began in Germany among the rationalists who were infected by their cultural and intellectual settings. Their approach to the critical examination of Scripture was an attempt to answer and counteract the skepticism that arose from the French Enlightenment. The earlier "higher critics" included such men as Jean Astruc (1684-1766) who held that Genesis 1 and 2 were written by two different authors, based on the distinctions between such words as "Elohim," "Yahweh Elohim" (or "Jehovah Elohim"), and "El-Elyon." He was followed by Johann Semler (1729-1791) who believed that Jesus accommodated His language to the current opinions of the Jews of His day regarding the Old Testament. He also denied that all parts of Scripture are equal in value.

This trend continued until the latter half of the nineteenth century when Graf,

Jeunen, and Wellhausen formulated the documentary hypothesis. This hypothesis held that the Pentateuch was compiled from four different sources based on the names used for God in each section. The four sources were compiled from 850 to 400 BC. With the finish of the last book “D,” someone allegedly put the books together and produced the Pentateuch (Moses is not even given the credit for compiling it).

Geisler and Nix write:

In recent times all of these trends have had their impact on the traditional doctrines of revelation, inspiration, and the authority of Scripture. Some evangelical scholars have attempted to incorporate various insights into the framework of the historical-grammatical method of interpreting. Others *have not been able to avoid the adoption of an erroneous or untenable position in their endeavor*. For many of them an extensive use of the dialectical method is the vehicle employed to achieve their scholarly synthesis.

An increasing number of evangelical professors in our traditionally conservative seminaries are unwittingly applying the reasoning of the liberal scholars’ higher critical approach to the Scripture, and as Geisler states, *“have not been able to avoid the adoption of an erroneous or untenable position in their endeavor.”*

What Do the Scriptures Say for Themselves?

Like any historical piece of literature, the Bible should be given the benefit of the doubt as to the accuracy of its claims. The accuracy of what it says should be called into question only if there is clear proof against what it claims. So, what does the Scripture say about its own nature?

The Mosaic Authorship of the Pentateuch

In Matthew 8:4, we read: “And Jesus said to him, ‘See that you tell no one, but go, show yourself to the priest and present the offering **that Moses commanded**, as a testimony to them.’”

In light of this statement, if someone other than Moses had written the book, Jesus would be lying. (Some point to the

accommodation theory. It states that Jesus is declaring what the people believed, though He knew otherwise. However, this would still be dishonesty.) Since Jesus Christ was God and His very nature is Truth, He cannot lie! Thus, this is a contradictory assertion.

The Book of Deuteronomy is attributed to an unknown source, according to the Documentary hypothesis. However, the Apostle Paul would disagree with such a conclusion. He writes: “But I say, surely Israel did not know, did they? At the first **Moses says**, ‘I WILL MAKE YOU JEALOUS BY THAT WHICH IS NOT A NATION, BY A NATION WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING WILL I ANGER YOU’ ” (Rom. 11:19).

In his letter to the church at Rome, Paul quotes from Deuteronomy 32:21. He does not seem to have the problem many of today’s scholars have when answering, “Who wrote Deuteronomy?” He clearly states the author was Moses. Yet, learned scholars of today put off such a notion. A. S. Van Der Woude, the general editor of *The World of the Old Testament*, writes that Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch is an hypothesis derived from “classical” sources. He states the following under the heading of “Hypothesis About the Origin of the Pentateuch.”

For centuries “official” Judaism and “official” Christianity have regarded Moses as the writer of the entire Pentateuch. The reader should realize, however, that this view did not arise as a result of historical research into the question of the origin of these books. Rather, by presenting Moses, the confidant of God, as the writer of the Pentateuch, this position attempted to stress the divine origin and thus the authority of the Pentateuch. There was hardly any concern about questions involving the origin of these writings. The focus of interest in the Pentateuch was doctrinal and practical.

Van Der Woude cites in his evaluation the reason why the New Testament writers and Jesus connected Moses with the Pentateuch.

In the New Testament the name of Moses is variously connected with the Pentateuch (e.g. Mark 7:10; 12:26; Luke 24:27, 44; John 1:45). [*All these references except John 1:45 were quoted by Jesus.*] From such references one can infer only the type of thinking about the authorship of the Pentateuch that was current at the time of Jesus and the apostles. (Italics mine.)

As mentioned before, Van Der Woude uses the accommodation theory to prove his idea. The people believed that Moses was the author, so Jesus and the apostles used that belief. There is nothing in all of Scripture, however, that would indicate that this is the case. Such dishonesty through silence would be a horrible blight on the Messiah and His mission.

The Authorship of Isaiah

The methods of criticism have also opened a floodgate of speculation on the Book of Isaiah. Many “evangelicals” hold to the idea that two different authors, and in some cases three, wrote the Book of Isaiah. Van Der Woude puts forth this claim:

The Book of Isaiah has two main parts, Chapters 1-39 and 40-66. The first part contains mainly prophecies from the time of Isaiah himself. The second puts us in the period of the Babylonian captivity or later (Deutero-Isaiah) . . . Chapters 40-66 of Isaiah transport us to a different time than that of Isaiah. Whereas many prophecies in 1-39 go back to Isaiah and relate to his time, the subsequent chapters relate to situations and events more than 150 years later, namely, the time of the Babylonian captivity . . . Yet not all prophecies in 40-66 are from one source. Particularly Chapters 56-66 are attributed to another prophet, usually designated Trito-Isaiah (third Isaiah).

Wilkerson and Boa comment:

The unity of this book has been challenged by critics who hold that a “Deutero-Isaiah” wrote Chapters 40-66 after the Babylonian captivity. They argue that Chapters 1-39 have an Assyrian background, while Chapters 40-66 are set against a Babylonian background. But Babylon is mentioned more than twice as often in Chapters 1-39 as in Chapters 40-66. The only shift is one of perspective from present time to future time. Critics

also argue that there are radical differences in the language, style, and theology of the two sections. Actually, the resemblances between Chapters 1-39 and Chapters 40-66 are greater than the differences. These include similarities in thoughts, images, rhetorical ornaments, characteristic expressions, and local coloring. It is true that the first section is more terse and rational, while the second section is more flowing and emotional, but much of this is caused by the different subject matter, condemnation versus consolation. Critics often forget that content, time, and circumstances typically affect an author’s style . . . Another critical argument is that Isaiah could not have predicted the Babylonian captivity and the return under Cyrus (mentioned by name in 44-45) 150 years in advance. This view is based on the mere assumption that divine prophecy is impossible, rejecting the predictive claims of the book (42:9). The theory cannot explain the amazing prophecies of Isaiah that were literally fulfilled in the life of Christ . . .

Many arguments refute the theory of two or three authors of Isaiah. Ryrice comments:

To claim two or more authors for this book is also to contradict the evidence of the New Testament. Quotations from Chapters 40-66 are found in Matthew 3:3; 12:17-21; Luke 3:4-6; Acts 8:28; Romans 10:16, 20 and all are attributed to Isaiah. Moreover, in John 12:38-41, quotations from Isaiah 6:9, 10 and 53:1 appear together and both are ascribed to the Isaiah who saw the Lord in the Temple vision of Chapter 6. . . .

And in the Scripture, both John and Paul allude to only one Isaiah.

. . . that **the word of Isaiah the prophet** might be fulfilled, which he spoke, “LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT? AND TO WHOM HAS THE ARM OF THE LORD BEEN REVEALED?” “For this cause they could not believe, for Isaiah said again, ‘HE HAS BLINDED THEIR EYES, AND HE HARDENED THEIR HEART; LEST THEY SEE WITH THEIR EYES, AND PERCEIVE WITH THEIR HEART, AND BE CONVERTED, AND I HEAL THEM’ (John 12:38-41).

However, they did not all heed the glad

tidings; for **Isaiah** says, "LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT?" (Rom. 16:20, quoting Isaiah 53:1).

And **Isaiah** is very bold and says, "I WAS FOUND BY THOSE WHO SOUGHT ME NOT, I BECAME MANIFEST TO THOSE WHO DID NOT ASK FOR ME" (Rom. 16:20, quoting Isaiah 65:1, 2).

Thus, John and Paul affirm that only one Isaiah authored the book by his name.

One last proof to look at is from the Dead Sea Scrolls. These many scrolls have been an object of fascination. Ancient copies of nearly every Old Testament book have been found along with commentaries on several of the books. A complete copy of Isaiah was found among the documents. In fact, "the old Testament book of Isaiah was found in the first discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in Cave One, and it is one of the seven original manuscripts found. The Book of Isaiah is contained in its entirety in this scroll." Does the Isaiah Scroll support one, two, or three authors for Isaiah? When the Isaiah Scroll was discovered there was much hope on both sides for evidence of their perspective positions. Randall Price writes:

When the *Isaiah Scroll* was examined it revealed no break or demarcation of any sort between the contested divisions. Chapter 40 begins on the very last line of the column that included Isaiah 38:9-40:8. The last words on the former column are "cry to her . . ." and the first words on the latter column are ". . . that her warfare is accomplished." It is evident that the scribe who wrote those words was not aware of a supposed change in situation or authorship beginning with Chapter 40. Four samples of *Isaiah Scrolls* subjected to carbon 14 dating produced calibrated age ranges between 335-324 BC and 202-107 BC, and the paleographic date range is between 125-100 BC. The scribal evidence in these copies indicate that they were the results of at least several generations of copying. Yet even with a date sometime during the second century BC, critical scholars cannot assign portions of Isaiah's prophecies to the Maccabean period, or claim that first-century inser-

tions were added to the text. The second-century BC date should also establish the *Isaiah Scroll* as an early witness in favor of the unity of Isaiah, since it (or an earlier copy from which it was generated) accorded roughly with the time the Septuagint version of the prophets was written (the Septuagint also has no indication of a textual break between Chapters 39 and 40). However, critical (and most conservative) scholars disallow this early evidence in favor of single authorship because it is claimed that the recognition of multiple authorship (along with final redaction of the book) came later than these Qumran copies.

Thus the weight of evidence, if one enters this examination with an open mind, supports the claims of Scripture on the authorship of these books. Only a pre-conceived bias would cause someone to claim otherwise.

Biblical Passages on Inspiration and Inerrancy?

Let us now return to Scripture and let it speak for itself on how it was recorded. As Feinberg states, "At the heart of the belief in an inerrant, infallible Bible is the testimony of Scripture itself." Scripture itself has much to say about its inspired nature. The Apostle Peter writes: "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).

This gives us some insight into how inspiration took place. The Greek verb translated "moved" here is *phero*, meaning "to bear," "to carry," or "to bring forth." It is significant that the verb is passive. Therefore, it could be said that prophets were "carried along" by the Holy Spirit as they wrote.

Another helpful verse is given in Paul's second letter to Timothy. There he writes, "*All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness*" (2 Tim. 3:16). Here the Greek word translated "inspired" is *theopneustos*. This is a compound word meaning "God" (*Theos*) and

“to breathe out” (*pneuo*). Thus, Scripture is the out-breathing of God! Geisler and Nix comment on the term *Scripture*:

The use of the word *Scripture* has a distinct and technical sense in the New Testament, as may be readily seen by its specialized application. The term is reserved in its definitive and articular sense for only the authoritative and canonical books of Holy Writ. For the devout, although converted, Jews who wrote the books of the New Testament, to describe any other books by this technical word amounts to claiming inspiration for them. As a matter of fact, that is precisely what Peter claims for Paul’s epistles when he writes, “Our beloved Paul . . . wrote you . . . as also in all his letters . . . which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the *Scriptures*” (2 Peter 3:15, 16). Here Paul’s writings are considered Scripture in the same sense as the Old Testament writings referred to earlier in the same passage (2 Peter 3:5, 7, 8). Although this passage does not claim that all the New Testament books are Scripture, it does include many of them. In 1 Timothy 5:18 the apostle Paul quotes from Luke, placing it on the same level with the rest of Scripture, using the introduction “for the Scripture says” (with reference to Luke 10:7). Certainly if Paul’s and Luke’s writings were considered Scripture, then the epistles of the apostles of Jesus, and particularly those of the “inner circle” (Peter and John), which traditionally make up most of the remainder of the New Testament, cannot logically be excluded from the category of inspired Scripture.

So if all “Scripture” is inspired (2 Tim. 3:16), here referring to the “sacred writings” or the Old Testament which Timothy had known from childhood (3:15), and the New Testament is also “Scripture” (1 Tim. 5:18; 2 Peter 3:16), then the New Testament is inspired.

The Bible is its own best witness to the truthfulness of the Word. The Scriptures are replete with verses stating over and over the truthfulness of God’s Word and how we may depend on them.

The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The pre-

cepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the judgments of the Lord are true; they are righteous altogether (Psalm 19:7-9).

God has handed down to us His Word as revealed through the Scriptures. In that Word is truth to help us live holy lives dedicated to Him. The Word is declared to be perfect; despite the claim of those who hold to limited inerrancy. Jesus states: “For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished” (Matt. 5:18).

Jesus assures His followers that all of the entire text of the Old Testament is vital and useful. From the smallest letter in Hebrew (*yodh*) to the strokes that make up the letters, they are all important. Not only are the words important but the letters as well.

If he called them gods, to whom the Word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), . . . (John 10:35).

Jesus informs His listeners as to the force of Scripture. Jesus used the phrase “the Scripture cannot be broken” to detract from anyone claiming that the Scripture was in error. In other words, the Word will come to pass as written.

For the Scripture says, “YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING,” and “The laborer is worthy of his wages” (1 Tim. 5:18).

In Paul’s writings to Timothy, he quotes from the Old Testament (Deut. 25:4) and from the New Testament (Luke 10:7). Both of these passages are called Scripture. Paul maintains that both the Testaments are to be considered equal and accepted as material from God. Peter states:

. . . and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction (2 Peter 3:15, 16).

Peter elevates the writings of Paul to a level equal with the Old Testament. His proclamation linking Paul's writings to Scripture also give us insight into what the early church used for a canon. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* says:

The fact that Peter referred to Paul's letters and then to "the other Scriptures" indicates that Paul's writings were then considered authoritative Scripture. Such behavior—twisting the Scripture to suit their own purposes—is met with God's judgment which, in this case, the ignorant and unstable bring on themselves in the form of destruction (*apoleian*; cf. 2:1, 3). Believers may not fully understand all the Scriptures, but they certainly ought not twist their obvious meanings.

So, the Scripture itself makes strong claims to be inspired and inerrant. It also gives us insight into how inspiration occurred. The person who chooses to cast doubt on this fact, without showing good proof, is in a sense questioning the very nature of God and the claims of Jesus Christ.

Do Other Areas of Science Support the Bible's Claim to Inspiration and Inerrancy?

An open and honest approach reveals abundant scientific evidence that verifies claims of Scripture. Note the following two claims related to the fields of medical science and archaeology.

Medical Science

Most people today take for granted the knowledge of germs and their effects on the body. Yet as little as one hundred years ago, such knowledge would have been considered more superstition than fact.

Many doctors affirmed that people became sick by chance, not by microbes. Ancient Egypt, which many uphold as the most advanced civilization at the time of Moses, utilized very curious methods of disease control. A book entitled, *An Ancient Egyptian Herbal* by Lise Manatee, details the common ingredient in most Egyptian cures. The ingredients differ according to the animals from which they are obtained, but they contain one constant, *dung*. These

"cures" created by such an ingredient would relieve the patient of pain, because the patient would die!

As the Egyptians literally revered dung as the miracle drug, the Bible warned of dangers from dung. Easy steps were given to prevent diseases that occur from improper sanitation.

You shall set off a place outside the camp and, when you go out to use it, you must carry a spade among your gear and dig a hole, have easement, and turn to cover the excrement (Deut. 23:12, 13).

The Book of Leviticus, however, gives us guidelines on how to treat those who are infected with disease. Much of Leviticus details how to avoid contracting disease, such as forbidding the people to eat an animal that had died naturally or had been eaten by wild animals.

And the fat of a beast that dies naturally, and the fat of what is torn by wild animals, may be used in any other way; but you shall by no means eat it (Lev. 7:24).

Any animal carcass found would be dangerous. If it died of a disease, the germs would still be on the corpse. Infectious germs would also develop within hours of the creature's death. God's command saved many of the Jews from making a fatal mistake.

This is a simple solution to a problem that mankind has been plagued with for centuries. The Bible delivers to us in plain literal language a method that would have saved untold lives.

Archaeology

For many years the Hittites have been a major stumbling block in Old Testament history. No evidence up until the twentieth century could be cited for their existence, except for the mentioning of them in the Old Testament. Renowned archaeologist and author C. W. Ceram writes:

From these [Joshua 3:10 and Numbers 13:29] and a few other mentions in the Bible, the Hittite people would seem to have been a tribe inhabiting Syria, and of

no particular distinction. There is one passage, however, which would have given historians pause long before Sayce if nineteenth-century science had not been so wary of the Bible as a source of history. This was 2 Kings 7:6: "For the Lord had made the host of the Syrians to hear a noise of chariots, and a noise of horses, even the noise of a great host: and they said one to another, Lo, the King of Israel hath hired against us the kings of the Hittites, and the kings of the Egyptians, to come upon us." In contrast to all previous Biblical references, where the Hittites are coupled with tribes which never made any impression upon history, the Hittite kings are here named in one breath with the most powerful monarch of the ancient world. The Hittite kings are, in fact, even given precedence over the Egyptian pharaohs.

The Bible not only gives them a place in history, but places them above the mighty Egyptians. For years scholars scoffed at the Biblical accounts. They assumed since archaeology had found no trace of the Hittites then they did not exist and the Bible was in error. Nineteenth and twentieth century archaeology provided the answers to the Hittite problem. Unger writes:

It is now known that the center of Hittite power was in Asia Minor. There an empire that once vied with Egypt and Assyria, but had long been forgotten, has been discovered by modern archaeologists. A missionary at Damascus named William Wright and the orientalist A. H. Sayce were among the first scholars to piece together the picture of this ancient imperial people . . . Many scholars consider the Hittites to be the third most influential of ancient peoples in the Middle East, rivaling the Egyptians as well as the Mesopotamians. Hebrews dreaded them as well as the empires on the Tigris and Euphrates. About 1750 B.C. they destroyed the Babylonian capital of the great Hammurabi. Their aggressiveness is demonstrated also in their commercial activities, which included an extensive trade in horses with Solomon . . . The Hittites also kept secret their iron-smelting formula when iron was regarded to be almost as valuable as silver and gold. Not until two centuries later did the Philistines come into this knowledge and

not until the Saul-Davidic era did Israel learn it.

The Bible is once again proven true. An old axiom says, "With every turn of dirt by an archaeologist spade, the Bible is proved over, and over, and over." In fact, the Bible provided not only for the Hittites, but a Hittite nation. Many laughed, but in the end, the Bible was proven true.

Implications to Christian Growth

The Apostle Peter writes, ". . . like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation" (1 Peter 2:2).

There is a proper diet for a Christian to grow spiritually. Just as a baby needs milk when he is first born, the baby Christian needs the same. He must begin taking in the soft stuff, the easily digested. This will allow him to grow; then one day he will find himself ready for more substantial food. No Christian should remain a baby forever, but should endeavor to grow. The Word nourishes the Christian's growth.

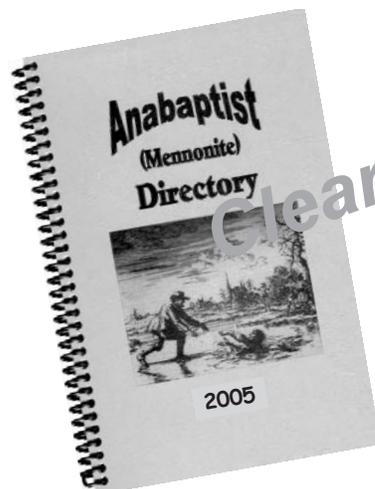
But if the Bible contains mistakes, as the liberal contends, how is one to grow? If you give the wrong food to a baby he will grow weak, sick, and may die. The same is true for a Christian who is not sure of what he reads in the Word. They will not grow for they will constantly be questioning what they read, instead of digesting it and allowing it to help them grow.

Conclusion

The above is only a few of the many hundreds of proofs that God's hand was upon the Holy Scriptures. Internally, the Bible claims to be inspired by God and without error. Externally, there is yet to be one shred of proof that it is anything other than what it claims. The importance of this doctrine is stated by Francis Schaeffer in the following statement. He states, ". . . *compromising the full authority of Scripture eventually affects what it means to be a Christian theologically and how we live in the full spectrum of human life.*" ■

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