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The Bible Structure, Content and Interpretation

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Not One Holy Book among Many

My goal is to write a long thesis on the Word of God. I honestly do not know where it will take me, but I long to explore it as much as I am able. I have written briefly before on this subject, but never as thoroughly as I will presently do. My reason for writing is that I love the Word and live my life under its authority. Even more, I want others to love the Word and live under its authority.

To begin with, I believe the 66 books contained in our Bible are the Word of God. I will expound more on this later, but I trust the providence of God in preserving the Canon as it stands. With that, the Word is inspired and living (Hebrews 4:12). As we read the Bible, with the Spirit's guidance, we come to know the very essence of life itself. It is not one holy book among many; it is the one God-breathed document on the planet. It is God's one love letter to humanity.

The Canon for the Old Testament

The Canon for the Old Testament was formed and accepted by the time of Christ. It was probably finished and accepted by the time of Ezra in the fifth century B. C. The New Testament, the way it is today, had its form by 325 A. D. but was formally stated in 350-367 A. D. That does not mean the 27 books of the New Testament were not Scripture before that, but only that a formalized declaration was made.

Heretical Canons

There were rival and heretical canons, along with apocryphal gospels being promoted, so there needed to be an authorized standard for the Church. Canon is a Greek word meaning, "a measuring rod," or "a ruler." Metzger adds another reason for the Canon, "when Christians were persecuted for their faith it became a matter of utmost importance to know which books could and which could not be handed over to the imperial police without incurring the guilt of sacrilege" (p. 276). It also gave the early Church a criteria of which books could be read at

Christian Literature and Living www.christianliteratureandliving.com

5 : 8 November 2009

Stan Schmidt

The Bible: Structure, Content and Interpretation

worship services as the Word of God. Geisler and Nix say, “the first hundred years of the existence of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament reveal that virtually every one of them was quoted as authoritative and recognized as canonical by men who were themselves the younger contemporaries of the Apostolic Age” (p. 291). Before the end of the first century, all 27 books were written, copied, and disseminated among the Churches (Colossians 4:16, 1 Thessalonians 2:13, 5:27, 1 Timothy 5:8, 2 Peter 3:15-16).

Took Time to Set the Canon: Also Attempts to Destroy Scriptures

Other reasons why it took awhile to state a specific canon were that communication and transportation were slow in those days. Again, persecution did not allow the freedom and resources to finalize the divine canon. It did not take long once the persecution ended to state the 27 books as authoritative.

As a side note: Diocletian in the early 4th century tried to wipe out Christianity. Part of that process was to destroy all copies of the Scriptures. Of course he did not complete that job, but he did manage to destroy many.

Human Aspects to the Bible

Certainly there is a human aspect to the Bible—God works through humans. That is one of the glories of our God—carrying out His purpose even with fallen humanity. With that, man did not dictate the Canon, they discovered it. They did not manufacture it, they marveled at it. Man does not give the Bible its authority—God does. All the books in the New Testament were already recognized as God’s Word (Colossians 4:16); they just had not put them all together in one package. The 27 books were self-authenticating. In other words, man did not impose his ideas onto the books, but rather the inspired documents imposed themselves onto the Church. So, the final Canon was simply man putting into one book what they knew God had already inspired.

Does the Bible claim to be the Word of God?

Does the Bible claim to be the Word of God? Of course it does (Exodus 24:4, Psalms 119:89, Matthew 15:6, John 17:17, Romans 3:2, Revelation 22:18)! Paul said that all Scripture was inspired (God-breathed) by God (2 Timothy 3:16, 1 Corinthians 2:13, 1 Thessalonians 5:27). Actually the term God-breathed (*theopneustos*) was coined by Paul. Peter said that men spoke for God as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21, 3:16, 1 Peter 1:12, John 14:26, 16:13).

Christian Literature and Living www.christianliteratureandliving.com

5 : 8 November 2009

Stan Schmidt

The Bible: Structure, Content and Interpretation

Biblical writers gave validation to other Biblical writers (Psalms 105-106, Daniel 9:2, Ezekiel 14:14, Acts 7, Romans 4:3, 5:14, 15:4, 2 Corinthians 11:3, Hebrews 7:1-3, 10:28, 11:33, James 5:11, 17).

Paul knew that what he was saying was the very Word of God (Romans 1:2, Galatians 1:11-12, 1 Corinthians 2:10-13, 1 Thessalonians 2:13).

The disciples quoted the Old Testament as if it was the Word of God. Jesus gave validity to the entire Old Testament (Matthew 5:17, 11:23, 22:29, 23:35, 26:54, Mark 14:49, Luke 11:51). Interestingly, that does not include the Apocrypha.

Jesus gave credence to Adam (Matthew 5:4-5), Noah (Matthew 24:37), Daniel (Matthew 24:15), and Jonah (Matthew 12:40). That would mean Jesus acknowledged the truth of the Garden, the Flood, and the whale. Besides, time and again in the Bible we have various forms of “thus says the Lord” (Exodus 20:1, Jeremiah 1:4, 17:5, 36:6, 48:40, Ezekiel 3:27, Revelation 1:8).

Matthew and Chronicles

As a side note; as seen in the Luke 11:51 passage above, the Hebrew Scriptures end with 2 Chronicles not Malachi. It is the same as ours just arranged differently. Along that line, we see Matthew beginning with a genealogy which links with the genealogies of 2 Chronicles. Also, 2 Chronicles ends with the “God with us” theme, of which Matthew picks up in his chapter 1.

OT Passages in NT: Inspiration

On another front; there are times in the New Testament where an Old Testament passage is quoted and accredited to being written by the Holy Spirit (Mark 12:36, Acts 1:16, Hebrews 3:7). That shows the dual authorship of God working through men. It was not as though God dictated it as men’s minds were blank.

Richards says, “Each reflects the language patterns of his culture. Each uses language that reveals his education and background. No, inspiration simply affirms that God the Holy Spirit worked within the personalities of the writers, so that what they wrote accurately communicates what he (God) intended” (p. 15).

Yes, men physically wrote the Bible, but God was the orchestrator. Geisler and Nix put it well, “Like a symphony, each individual part of the Bible contributes to an overall unity that is orchestrated by one Master” (p. 195). Patzia adds this,

What God did, however, was to subject his written Word to the same historical process as he did with his incarnate Word, Jesus. The Bible is both a divine and human entity: divine in its inspiration and preservation, human in the sense of God’s subjecting it to the historical process and entrusting it to the church. (p. 136)

Geisler and Nix add one more thought, “Inspiration is that mysterious process by which the divine causality worked through the human prophets without destroying their individual personalities and styles to produce divinely authoritative and inerrant writings” (p. 39).

Technical Issues

I want to explore some technical issues about the Bible.

The Old Testament was written primarily in Hebrew and the New Testament in Greek. When Greek became the language of the day in the 3rd century B.C. the Old Testament was translated into Greek (by Greek speaking Jews in Alexandria). We call that the Septuagint or LXX (apparently translated by 70 scribes).

Most Old Testament quotations in the New Testament are taken from the LXX. An interesting point is that Hebrew is a felt language and Greek is a thought language. Geisler and Nix say, “Because Greek possessed a technical precision not found in Hebrew, the theological truths that were more generally expressed in the Hebrew of the Old Testament were more precisely formulated in the Greek of the New Testament” (p. 329).

Translating the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek

By the way, translating the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek was no easy task. First of all, the languages are very different. Second of all, the Hebrew Old Testament is a massive volume. Third of all, the Hebrew had never been translated into a new language so they were covering uncharted territory as far as word usage and interpretation.

As a side note; Jesus and His disciples spoke Aramaic. But, since Greek was the language of the Empire, and the disciples were to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth, the New Testament was written in Greek.

The Autographs

The autographs were the original written texts. It is they that were perfect and exactly how God wanted them. We do not have the autographs in our possession today, but we do have myriad of manuscripts that give us confidence that we have what the originals said. Perhaps one reason why God did not see fit to preserve the autographs is because of man's tendency to worship relics. Maybe He did not preserve them so no one could tamper with them. But now, it is hard to tamper with 5000 copies spread all over the world.

Written on Papyrus

The Scriptures were originally written on papyrus, which is the inner bark of a plant. It was formed into a paper-like material, glued together, and rolled into a scroll. Parchment also was used, which was made from animal skin. It was more costly, but more durable. Its primacy began in the 4th century (paper began to be widely used in the 12th century). There was eventually the codex. They were folded sheets stitched together like a book. Actually, the codex book form was pioneered by the Church. It made it easier for reading and studying, rather than having to unroll a scroll. It was also written on both sides of the page. Another reason may have been to differentiate the Church from the synagogue which used scrolls for their Old Testament.

5000 Complete or Portions of the New Testament

We have over 5000 complete or portions of the New Testament in existence today (extant), and 8000 thousand in Latin, a thousand in other languages, as well as thousands of Hebrew Old Testament manuscripts. That dwarfs any other writing of ancient times. Some of these manuscripts date to within 50-100 years of when they were written.

Even Homer's works only have around 600 copies. Plato (400 B. C.) only has seven copies still in existence, and they date from 1300 years *after* they were written. What that means is that the evidence for the New Testament is staggering. With all the copies we have we can ascertain what the originals said.

Even more, for the Old Testament, the Dead Sea Scrolls gave validity to the accuracy that has been preserved throughout the centuries. They offer us manuscripts a thousand years older than what we had, and yet the identical nature of both reveal the precision in which manuscripts have been passed down. For example, the Isaiah copies of the Scrolls are 95% identical to our Hebrew Bible, and the remaining 5% is simply slips of the pen and variations in spelling. Even more, for Isaiah 53, out of the 166 words of the chapter only one word was in question, and that one word had no significant change of meaning.

Other Evidences

Besides the manuscripts, there is a host of evidence for the New Testament. There are 36,000 Biblical quotations in the Church fathers. In fact, 99% of the New Testament was quoted by early Christian writers. In other words, if no copies of the New Testament survived, we could still reconstruct the entire New Testament (besides 11 verses) by the writings of the Church fathers.

One thing that has to be mentioned about the Church fathers is whether they were writing from a manuscript or quoting from memory. With that, when they were quoting a Gospel, which Gospel were they quoting? To figure all that out is part of textual criticism.

Another point is that the New Testament was written in the common Greek language of the first century (Koine). In other words, *it was written in the first century*. It was not some later fraudulent invention.

Also, there was no corruption. It was not possible for all the manuscripts from all the different places to be gathered together and manipulated so as to create a false caricature of the truth. Too many manuscripts from too many places were made to ever accomplish a conspiracy. Besides, all those who possessed Biblical manuscripts would have no reason to go to such lengths to corrupt what they were willing to die for. Ankerberg says,

if any group had complete control of the Bible, they would have the ability to manipulate it to their own ends. The vast number of manuscripts around the world make this an impossibility. It is easy to see the wisdom of divine providence behind this. In exchange for the incalculable benefits of having the Scriptures disseminated around the world and of preserving the text and preventing its corruption, the overall cost is a whopping one or two percent of minor textual variants. (p. 40)

Christian Literature and Living www.christianliteratureandliving.com

5 : 8 November 2009

Stan Schmidt

The Bible: Structure, Content and Interpretation

Beyond that, all the ugliness and sin of God's people is in the Bible. You would figure if the writers set out the frame a false story that they would have painted a prettier picture of themselves. No, they just wrote what happened, whether good or bad.

Furthermore, the New Testament books were confirmed by the apostles. They were either written by an apostle or had the apostle's seal of approval. That was a key element in their acceptance. They also had the internal evidence of being in thematic unity with the entire Scriptures, along with the witness of the Holy Spirit. And of course, Jesus considered His own words as the Word of God (Matthew 7:24-27, Mark 1:22, 27, John 8:31-32, 16:13-14). Time and again He said, "You have heard it said, but I say to you."

Translating the Bible

Let us talk about translations. Before I begin let me say something about the Latin versions. In the 4th century there were various versions available. The Pope wanted a more unified text (without all the various variants), so he commissioned Jerome, a linguist and Hebrew scholar, to make a unified Latin edition of the Bible. This is where we get the Latin Vulgate (the official Bible of the Roman Catholic Church). Other versions worth noting are the *Targums* (Aramaic), and the *Peshitta* (Syriac). The first English Bible project was by John Wycliffe in 1380. The invention of the printing press in 1454 was a major event in the history of the Bible (at that time only 33 languages had any part of the Bible). Greenlee states, "The difference this invention made for the civilized world is almost beyond comprehension" (*Intro*, p. 62). The first Bible off the press was the Vulgate (1456) and the first Greek NT off the press was in 1522. The first printed English Bible was the Coverdale (1534). By the way, *manuscript* is Latin for "written by hand."

William Tyndale was another key element in our present Bible. With his translation in 1524-1533, "the history of the English Bible took a decidedly new turn. He was the first one to render an English version directly from Hebrew and Greek...It is easy to miss the importance of the role Tyndale played in making the modern English Bible. He established the basic vocabulary, style, and thought forms of all future English translations" (Sailhamer, p. 72). Just a note; modern English had its beginning in the 15th century.

Again as in the 4th century, to preserve uniformity, King James 1 commissioned a new “authorized” translation. For many, the King James (1611) is thought of as the standard. It was the main translation used for many years. But, since that time we have discovered multitudes of manuscripts that were not available then. Even more, the expertise on Hebrew and Greek languages has vastly improved. In other words, the King James was a fine translation, but what we have today surpasses it in accuracy.

On that theme, there are arguments that say the King James is better because it is based on better manuscripts. That simply is not the case. The King James was based on the Byzantine family of manuscripts whereas the newer versions are based on the Alexandrian text-type. It is thought by present scholars that the Alexandrian is not only older (closer to the original), but more accurate. There are no Byzantine manuscripts that date before the fourth century. Even more, the Alexandrian type went the longest without significant change, whereas the Byzantine family tended to make more changes. In other words, the Alexandrian was more pure.

Idol Worship of KJV

Allow me to veer off here for a moment. I have read books by the KJV fanatics and have been sadly disappointed. As a matter of fact, I have read theological works for many years but I have never come across the bias and severe lack of objectivity as I have with some of these writers. To be candid, some of what they say is quite shocking. They use double standards, false accusations, and a major degree of prejudice. I have found their argument very childish and without foundation. The problem is that they pass their views off on the unsuspecting person who does not know the facts. Oh, they may use convincing rhetoric, but with a few hours of research one can see that it is all hot air. Now, I do not say that is how all King James adherents are, but there are some. Even more, as I read their material I found myself realizing that they were actually working for the wrong side. In other words, they were causing divisions in Christ’s Body (Proverbs 6:14-19). And, that is a big no-no with God. My prayer would be that God gets a hold of them before they do any more damage.

KJV’s Historical Importance

Moving on; the manuscripts underlying the King James do come from the majority (Majority Text). But there is good reason for that, “The center of

Christianity at this time was the Greek-speaking Byzantine empire. Christianity was the official religion of the empire, and great pains were taken to ensure uniformity of doctrine and practice. As a result, the manuscript copies of the Greek New Testament from this period show remarkable uniformity. These manuscripts are called the ‘Majority Text’ (Sailhamer, p. 25). Fee adds, “By the end of the seventh century, the Greek NT was being transmitted in a very narrow sector of the Church—namely, the Greek Orthodox Church with its dominant patriarchate in Constantinople. By the time of Chalcedon, Greek was almost unknown in the West” (*Studies*, p. 189).

And in the early centuries when persecution of the Church was taking place, many manuscripts were destroyed. So, they needed to be replaced and were thus replaced by the “family” text of that area. Even more, when Islam conquered the Byzantine empire in the 15th century, scholars fled to the West with their copies of the Greek New Testament. Thus, the West was flooded with that particular “family” of manuscripts—the Byzantine.

Discovery of Earlier and Better Manuscripts

But, that all changed in later centuries when earlier and better manuscripts were discovered from other parts of the world, like Egypt. And, great care was taken in preserving those Greek texts. The two most complete manuscripts of the entire New Testament, Codex Vaticanus (325 A. D.) and Codex Sinaiticus (350 A. D.), are of the Alexandrian text-type (4th century). Sinaiticus preserves the entire New Testament. The point is that just because the Byzantine manuscripts have the majority of copies does not mean they have the only say in the matter. Let us say we wanted to get an accurate description of Christianity and we had 3 Lutherans, 3 Baptists, and 24 Pentecostals. Would we take the Pentecostal view as the best since they represent the majority or would we give the other two groups equal say? The point is that manuscripts need to be weighed for importance rather than counted.

Resistance to Translate Anew

The King James was held in high esteem for 250 years and the thought of a new translation grated against people’s convictions. But, when the King James came out, it itself grated against the convictions of those who held to the Vulgate, which was held in high esteem for a thousand years prior, and before that it was the LXX. Even when the pilgrims came to America in 1620 they had their Geneva

Bible of 1560 because they thought that 1611 KJV was too modern. Sailhamer says regarding when the Revised Version came out in 1881,

At the heart of this argument lay the same issues the church had faced in the Reformation, where the Catholic church argued that one thousand years of the Vulgate was sufficient to demonstrate its reliability. The Reformers and the early translators of the English Bible argued that translations should be based on the best texts available—precisely what the translators of the Revised Version were saying. (p. 82)

God has not limited Himself to a 16th century Elizabethan language. Did Bible expertise on translation cease in 1611? What about the people who lived before that or the millions today who do not have the King James? Are they without the Word of God? We must be mature in our thinking.

Besides, the Byzantine text-family was not quoted by early Church fathers. In other words, if this is the text-from-God then why were the early Church fathers using a different text-family? The Byzantine text just did not exist for the first 250-300 years of the Church. There are some Byzantine readings of earlier date, but it did not exist as package-text. Fee says, “Why are there no MSS even partly representing the Majority text until the 5th century and no full-scale representatives until the 8th?” (*Studies*, p. 184).

Even more, the Byzantine family has many conflate readings, which means readings that combine the elements of two earlier text-types. On the flipside, the Vaticanus, a complete New Testament manuscript in the Alexandrian family, is astonishingly close to manuscripts from 200 A. D.

Some might say that many believers for centuries lived by and believed in the Byzantine text, so how could they be wrong if God is providential. First of all, Byzantine was in the East. In the West, the Latin Vulgate was the tea of choice. So, how could *they* be wrong if God is providential? Even more, the Byzantine was not the text “for all ages” as some claim. What about the first three centuries and the past two? What about the Church in Egypt or the West? It is sad to think, at this late date with all the advances in this area, that some extremists still charge people will meddling with the Word of God simply because they do not go exclusively by the KJV. That is just bias clouding over reason. We all need to be careful of the pride that pushes tradition over truth.

No One Is Wrong

Christian Literature and Living www.christianliteratureandliving.com

5 : 8 November 2009

Stan Schmidt

The Bible: Structure, Content and Interpretation

Second of all, **no one is wrong**, because no matter which text one is using it is virtually the same anyway. No doctrine of the Christian faith is in question by any minor differences. God's providence is not in one text-family, but in the fact that we have *all* of them. It is not an either/or.

On that note; the four main text families are like the colors of a rainbow. They do have their distinctiveness from one another, but at the same time, they also overlap so you cannot really see the lines.

The King James did not fall out of the sky as the only divine translation from heaven. The King James translators had to make choices like all translators, they were not infallible. They even had alternate renderings in the margins. Even Erasmus, who edited what would become the *Textus Receptus*, from which we get the KJV, changed his future editions after seeing superior readings in other translations. We also need to remember that the Byzantine family is not a uniform family. There are many variants even within that textual family. Even more, there are not even two manuscripts in that traditions that agree totally. In other words, the *Textus Receptus*, from which we get the King James, is not exactly the same as the Majority Text. The TR is based on a few manuscripts out of that family of manuscripts. Actually, there are quite a few differences between the Majority text and the TR—some have said at least 1800 differences.

Structural Division into Verses

As a side note; the first time the text was divided into numbered verses was in 1551 in Stephanus' fourth edition (chapter divisions began in the 13th century). His text was a subsequent edition to Erasmus (actually his 3rd edition of 1522), yet based on it, and so Stephanus' work (3rd edition 1550) was part of the process which led to the KJV. Also included in that process was Beza. It was actually several decades later that the Elzevir brothers (1633) coined the term *Textus Receptus*. As a historical note, the KJV used by people today "is not identical to Erasmus, Stephanus, or Beza, but is instead an 'eclectic' text that draws from various sources" (White, p. 63). So again, for the KJV fanatics who think that translation is the only inspired one; it has actually gone through many changes since it began. Stephanus even had readings in the margin. My point is that the KJV went through processes and did not fall out of the sky as the one divine Bible. It went through the historical process of textual criticism like any other translation.

By the way, Erasmus quickly made his text in 1516 with only a few late manuscripts to work from (none earlier than the 12th century). He even took some readings from the Latin Vulgate because he had no Greek manuscript for the whole New Testament. Therefore, we have readings in the *Textus Receptus* that have no known Greek support. Fee and Stuart said, “for the New Testament, the only Greek text available to the 1611 translators was based on late manuscripts, which had accumulated the mistakes of over a thousand years of copying” (p. 34). D. A. Carson adds this,

The translators of the KJV, as accomplished as they were, were totally unaware of the differences between Hellenistic (or Koine) Greek and the classical (usually Attic) Greek of earlier centuries. The relevant manuscripts had not yet been discovered...Moreover in 1611 translators followed the syntax of classical Greek; but now we know that the Greek of the New Testament corresponds syntactically to Hellenistic Greek. (p. 95)

Variants Did Not Really Matter

But at the end of the day, all the versions we have are virtually identical so the argument becomes somewhat moot. As a matter of fact, no matter which family of Greek manuscripts one is using, they are all 98% the same, or said another way, the variants constitute a thousandth part of the entire text.

The point is that we should rejoice that we have so many manuscripts available today so that the original text can be brought to light as closely as possible. The number and location of so many manuscripts actually safeguards the integrity of the text.

Besides, there were not photo copy machines in those days and scribes were human, “No reasonable person can expect even the most conscientious copyist to achieve technical infallibility in transcribing his original document into a fresh copy” (Archer, p. 29). With that said, the regiments that scribes went through to transcribe the Scriptures was very meticulous. They took their responsibilities very seriously. Actually, 95% of the variants are of the unintentional kind. Considering the primitive working conditions and materials, and the difficult script, we can see how mistakes were made. They were all made by hand, and if they were of considerable length, then we can see how no two copies would be exactly the same.

Furthermore, languages change. Most people today, who were not raised with the King James, cannot understand it. It does the world a disservice to push the King James with its archaic and outdated translation. Is that how God would operate? There is nothing wrong with new versions as long as they are accurately conveying the original text. Even more, the expertise on Hebrew and Greek in recent times, along with the discovery of older manuscripts gives us ample reason for newer versions. Geisler and Nix add,

Textual critics have made studied judgments on many of these significant variants, so that for all practical purposes the modern critical editions of the Hebrew and Greek texts of the Bible represent, with their footnotes, exactly what the autographs contained—line for line, word for word, and even letter for letter. Their objective has been to find God’s Word as it was written in the autographs. This ideal is a worthy goal, for it assumes that the Word of God as originally written is a perfect treasure of God’s revelation to men. (p. 489)

On Variants

Let us talk more about variants. It is a word or phrase difference in manuscripts. As a side note; one reason for this in the Old Testament is because it was originally written with no vowels. A person had to be quite well-versed in Hebrew to accurately transmit and translate it. Also, at times a scribe would try to smooth out the grammar at a particular point, not maliciously but conscientiously—and that would create a variant. Beyond that, words are different in various languages and cultures. There are also idioms, syntax, sentence structure, styles, poetic differences, etc. In a word, it is tough to translate from one language to another without losing at least something. The manuscripts are not infallible, the autographs are. The point of textual criticism is to ascertain, by the 5000 available manuscripts, what the original autographs said and meant.

Now some KJV fanatics will accuse the new versions of omitting a word or phrase. That is not the case. The point is that the KJV translators most likely added a word or phrase that the new versions thought as an addition and not original to the text. Take for example Colossians 1:14 and Ephesians 1:7. The KJV has “through his blood” in the Colossians verse whereas the new versions do not. That is called harmonization. Because the similar passage in Ephesians has the

phrase the translators added it to the Colossians passage even though it was not in the original. This harmonizing was used often in the Byzantine tradition whereas it is virtually non-existent in the Alexandrian text-type.

Variants Help Find the Original Text

Now is any of this a worry? No, not at all! Variants are actually the doorway to finding the original text. One of those variants **is** the original text. The experts, through textual criticism, can see how many of the differences came to be and which ones are probably errors, and which ones are original. Fee states, “When translators are faced with a choice between two or more variants, they usually can detect which readings are the mistakes because scribal habits and tendencies have been carefully analyzed by scholars and are now well known” (p. 31). Even more, all the variants are only in relation to a select number of passages. In other words, the majority of the New Testament is free of variants and solidified as the original.

So, with so many manuscripts available it actually makes the process of recovering the original more simple. Underlying the process of textual criticism is the belief that the original autographs were perfect and the exact Word of God. And, all those manuscripts were probably providential,

By having the text of the New Testament in particular “explode” across the known world, ending up in the far-flung corners of the Roman Empire in a relatively short period of time, God protected that text from the one thing that we could never detect: the wholesale change of doctrine or theology by one particular man or group who had full control over the text at any one point in its history. (White, p. 47)

No Significant Altering

Another thing is that if one of the variant readings from the margins of our Bible was put into the text there would be no significant altering of doctrine or meaning. Archer adds, “This can only be explained as the result of a special measure of control exercised by the God who inspired the original manuscripts of Scripture so as to inspire their preservation for the benefit of His people” (p. 30). As a matter of fact, the vast majority of the New Testament is textually certain. It is only a remaining few variations that are in question. But again, those small variations affect no Christian truth.

As far as variants; usually the shorter reading is preferred because scribes were more likely to add than omit (they would not want to omit something inspired). The more difficult reading was preferred because scribes were more likely to try and smooth a passage out. Earlier manuscripts are usually preferred to late because they were closer to the original. Those that come from quality manuscripts are to be preferred, as are those supported by the more established manuscripts. The reading that best explains the origins of the others is to be preferred. The reading that reflects no doctrinal bias on the part of the copyist is to be preferred. Other considerations would be context, genre, and style of the writer. So, even though there are variants, we can have confidence that amongst all the manuscripts we can ascertain what the originals said. James White said,

If you put ten people in a room and asked them all to copy the first five chapters of the Gospel of John, you would end up with ten “different” copies of John...So you would end up with a lot of VARIANTS. But would you not have ten copies of the same book? Yes, you would, and by comparing all ten copies you could rather easily reproduce the text of the original, because when one person makes a mistake, the other nine are not likely to do so at the very same spot. (p. 38-39)

I want to add a quote from Metzger. These experts can explain it better than I can,

It should be mentioned that, though there are thousands of divergencies of wording among the manuscripts of the Bible (more in the New Testament than in the Old), the overwhelming majority of such variant readings involve inconsequential details, such as alternative spellings, order of words, and interchange of synonyms. In these cases, as well as in the relatively few instances involving the substance of the record, scholars apply the techniques of textual criticism in order to determine with more or less probability what the original wording was. In any event, no doctrine of the Christian faith depends solely upon a passage that is textually uncertain. (p. 281)

Finally,

Copyists occasionally made mistakes in copying by hand the Scriptures. But we have so many hundreds of manuscripts of both the Old and New Testaments that by comparing them, we find not over one word in ten

thousand of the original manuscripts that cannot be reproduced as it was first given in the original languages. So many earnest scholars have made so many careful translations of the Bible in our own language, through hundreds of years of time, that we can, with confidence, depend upon our English translation of the Bible. (Rice, p. 7)

On Interpretation

I want to spend a short while on interpretation. The main point is to find out the original meaning of the text (exegesis). It is only then that we should move on to interpretation for our own day (hermeneutics). A passage cannot mean *now* what it did not mean *then*. I think much strange teaching and controversy would vanish if all of us would do the work of ascertaining what the original author meant when he wrote the text. Exegesis is the *control* so that we do not misinterpret the Scriptures.

For example, 1 Corinthians was written in the 1st century to a body of believers in a particular situation. There were things going on in Corinth which initiated the letter. It must be read in that light. How about Acts? Luke is not writing a book on doctrinal points. He is writing about the birth and expansion of the Church, especially in perspective of the Holy Spirit's role, and the Jewish/Jerusalem based Church to the Gentile world. Revelation is not a book where we need to press all the details. The theme of the book is the point—the victory of God and His people, and the ultimate demise of evil. When we press the details we may lose the main point.

Be Careful about Making Something a Historical Precedent

We also have to be careful about making something a historical precedent. In other words, just because something happened in the Bible does not mean it is supposed to happen to all believers for all time. Also, all of Scripture is God's Word *for* us, but not all of it is God's command *to* us. Again, what was the intent of the writer?

If we take the time to find out that groundwork then we will be less apt to falsely interpret it into our own situation. We dare not just yank a verse out of its context and see how it applies to "me." First we must find out what it meant to *them*. It is also helpful to know the genre of what we are reading. The Psalms are poetic, 1 Samuel is historical, Romans is theological, and Revelation is prophetic. At times

there was Hebraic overstatement. Again, we need to read them the way they were intended to be understood.

Importance of Context

Context is king. We must interpret a verse in light of its paragraph, in light of its chapter, in light of its book, and ultimately in light of the whole Bible. Again, many fringe teachings would be seen for what they are if taken in light of its context.

One more thing is that we must try, with the help of the Spirit, to minimize, or neutralize, our own bias. All of us come to the text with certain presuppositions. That cannot be what guides our interpretation. We must let the text speak for itself. The Holy Spirit inspired to original text so let us ask the Holy Spirit to guide us to the original meaning.

God's Story

There is only one God Who is the Creator. He is not a schizophrenic as if all religions had the truth in various forms. That simply cannot be. The one God had one plan to deal with the sin of the world and restore what was lost in Eden. That plan was to choose Abraham and the Israelites, which ultimately was fulfilled in the Messiah. That is all God has been doing since the beginning. That one story of the one God is explained in the Bible. No other religion has that story. Other holy books are man-made, perversions, or lies. That is not a biased statement, but one based on common sense.

If Jesus is the very manifestation of God Himself, but the Koran says Muhammad supersedes Jesus, then how can the two ideologies ever be reconciled? They cannot! The Jehovah's Witnesses deny the Deity of Christ which misses the entire point of the Messiah. Mormonism is so filled with gobbledygook that one marvels that anyone could actually believe it. No other religion has the one Creator working through His Messiah to reconcile the world. All roads do not lead to God—there is one way and all the other options have missed it. We may want to be politically correct, but universalism promotes sheer nonsense.

God's Revelation

God made it very clear in His Word that He alone is the one God (Exodus 3:14, Psalms 90:2, Isaiah 40:18-28). He said, "Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of

the earth! For I am God, and there is no other” (Isaiah 45:22), and “the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is called” (Isaiah 54:5), and again, “For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the Lord made the heavens” (Psalms 96:5). My point is that there is one God and He has one way of reconciliation with Himself, and that is through His Son Who was sacrificed on the Cross and rose from the dead. That is the one God’s agenda for all six billion people on earth. And again, the Bible is the only book that gives us that true story.

Human Authors

I marvel at the wisdom of God displayed in the Scriptures. It is a book that was written over 1500 years by 40 authors in 3 languages. Many of these people did not even know each other, but they were being carried along by the Spirit to document the Creator’s story. They were fishermen, farmers, doctors, and kings. With that, there is a continuity of theme and purpose that reveal God’s historical plan to put the world back together again. It is the story of creation and new creation, of covenant and New Covenant. The more we come to understand the Bible and how it fits together the more we are amazed at our God. After Paul was converted he had time to contemplate Jesus. I am sure he began to see how Jesus fit in with the entire story from Genesis to Malachi. God has always been going somewhere. God spoke through His prophets in times gone by but He finally spoke by His very Son (Hebrews 1:1-3). Basically, God finally showed up in Person.

The Story of Jesus

Let us look at a few examples of how Jesus in the first century was the consummation of things prophesied hundreds and thousands of years earlier (Luke 24:44). Of course there is Genesis 3:15 where God told the serpent that Eve’s seed would bruise his head. On the Cross Jesus defeated Satan (Colossians 2:15) and will one day bring his demise to consummation (Romans 16:20). The old sacrificial system to deal with sin was a shadow of the Lamb of God Who would take away the sin of the world (John 1:29). Moses said that God would raise up a prophet among the Jews who would speak the very words of God (Deuteronomy 18:18). Jesus was the ultimate fulfillment of that (Matthew 7:24-27, John 8:31-32). God told David that a king would forever sit on his throne (2 Samuel 7). Jesus was descended of David and the King Whose kingdom would never end (Isaiah 9:6-7, Romans 1:3-4, Revelation 19:16). The Psalms has God

Christian Literature and Living www.christianliteratureandliving.com

5 : 8 November 2009

Stan Schmidt

The Bible: Structure, Content and Interpretation

promising His Messiah that He would be a Priest (110). Jesus is that High Priest after the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 5:6). Jeremiah 31 speaks of a new covenant for Israel of which Jesus brought to pass (Luke 22:20, 2 Corinthians 3:6). Ezekiel 36 speaks of God giving His people a new heart and a new spirit. Jesus, by His death and Resurrection, ushered in the age of the Spirit (Acts 2). Zechariah prophesied that the king would come riding on a donkey (9:9). Jesus fulfilled that to a T when He rode into Jerusalem heralded as King (Matthew 21). These are a mere sampling of how the Bible fits together hand-in-glove.

Some think Jesus did not see Himself as the Messiah. From all the verses just mentioned, how could He not know? He was not an ignorant man; He was very aware that what He was doing and saying was something only the Messiah could do and say. Again, He was very aware of how He fit into Israel's history and into God's agenda.

Reasons that Support the Authenticity of the Bible

Let us spend some time on reasons that support the authenticity of the Bible. Fulfilled prophecy is huge. No other holy book has such a thing. The Bible is filled with things God said would happen hundreds and even over a thousand years prior. These are not myths, but historical facts. The list is endless, many of which I mentioned in the paragraph above, but here are a few more (Isaiah 11:1, 53:4-12, Ezekiel 34:15, 37:21, Micah 5:2, Zechariah 12:10, Mark 13:1-2).

Miracles substantiated the message given by Moses, Elijah, Jesus, and the disciples. These again are not myths, but historical facts. These miracles were not done in secret but right there in front of the world. In other words, these events could not be disproved, because everyone saw them. So, the message was attested to by miracles, and by the witness of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of those who believed.

Another reason is that the disciples gave their lives for what they believed. Now someone may give their life for a lie without knowing it is a lie, but no one would give their life for what they knew was a lie. The disciples knew Jesus, His message and miracles, and saw Him risen from the dead. Some think the disciples wrote their ideas *back into* history rather than recording actual history. Why would they do that if they believed Jesus was the promised Messiah and Lord of all? The point is that these men were men of integrity who would not make up stories and

then die for a deception. Even more, the Bible has transformed more lives throughout history than any other book.

History and Archaeology

Two other areas that confirm the authenticity of the Bible are history and archaeology. The Scriptures are solid in both these areas and has never been proven otherwise. Archer states,

As I have dealt with one apparent discrepancy after another and have studied the alleged contradictions between the biblical record and the evidence of linguistic, archaeology, or science, my confidence in the trustworthiness of Scripture has been repeatedly verified and strengthened by the discovery that almost every problem in Scripture that has ever been discovered by man, from ancient times until now, has been dealt with in a completely satisfactory manner by the biblical text itself—or else by objective archaeological information. (p. 12)

Also, all the Biblical writers do not present a circular reasoning. The Bible is 66 books by many different authors in different centuries who all agree. It is a testimony of many witnesses.

Storehouse of Treasures

The Bible is a storehouse of treasures. It tells us about God, Who He is, how He has dealt with people, His plan to restore the world, His love, His holiness, and how we fit into what He is doing. As we study His Word we come to know His utter faithfulness. We come to see His love for His fallen world (John 3:16, Genesis 12:1-3, Ezekiel 38:16, 39:7). Subsequently, we give our lives for His glory (Romans 8:32, 1 John 3:1).

Intimacy with God, which includes obedience and faith, is the purpose of our existence (Psalms 42:1, 43:4, 63:3, 73:25, 130:6). To love the Lord is our highest calling. The place where we know the Lord is in His Word. We must seek Him diligently. We must ask the Spirit to work through the Word to transform us. That is the essence of the New Covenant; the forgiveness of sins and the Word of God written on our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

Now those in Christ constitute the people of God. For all the bad press that the world or Satan may throw at the Body of Christ, the Church is the renewed New

Covenant people. The Church is “the pillar and bulwark of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15). And, the fight for truth is a war (2 Peter 2:1, 1 John 4:1). Ephesians calls the Word of God the sword of the Spirit (6:17). Swords are used in battle. Now this war is not against people, but against the powers of darkness (2 Corinthians 11). If we are to win this battle we must know the Lord and know His Word (Matthew 4:4). It is the Devil who will taunt us, “Did God say?” (Genesis 3:1). The cosmic war is not a charade. Satan and his cohorts are not on vacation and we dare not be either (2 Timothy 4:1-4, 1 Peter 5:8-9).

Our Constant North Star

The Bible is our constant, our North Star (Psalms 119: 72, 2 Peter 1:3-4). We cannot be like those who base everything on feelings and experiences. Our foundation is the Word of God. Some downplay theology as stuffy. Perish the thought! Theology is about God. If we do not have accurate theology then we must question if we even know the true God. It is the truth of Christ by which we are anchored (Ephesians 4:12-14). We are not looking for some euphoric encounter or the god-in-all-of-us. What we are looking for is Jesus Christ of Nazareth risen from the dead now at the Father’s right hand. He was a Jew Who came to fulfill God’s promises to Israel and therefore for the world. He was the fulfillment of God’s one plan *through* Israel *for* the world. This is the reality under which we all live and which no other religion offers. And, God made sure that His story was preserved throughout the centuries in what we call the Bible. *Bible* comes from the Greek (*ta biblia*), meaning “the books.” The plural was used in ancient times, but the Church used the singular Latin word *Biblia* once the Bible (66 books) became the one packaged Word of God.

Who Is On Trial?

There is endless speculation by the skeptics, but if God is Who He is then would we expect anything less than a written record for all time? Some may say, “but that would be supernatural.” Of course it would! We are talking about the Creator. The skeptics only focus on the human element as if God does not operate in the supernatural. Rice sums it up well,

it is not the Bible that is on trial but the reader of the Bible. Let God’s Word be true and every man a liar. The critics damn not the Bible but themselves.

Unbelievers prove not their wisdom but their folly. Those who will not believe Christian Literature and Living www.christianliteratureandliving.com

5 : 8 November 2009

Stan Schmidt

The Bible: Structure, Content and Interpretation

the Bible and trust the Christ of the Bible lose comfort day by day, lose assurance in the heart, lose the answer to their prayers and, God pity them, lose everlasting life and the joys of Heaven!...The only reason one does not believe the Bible is that he has not honestly investigated it, has not given God's Word a chance to prove itself, as it will to a sincere, surrendered heart that intelligently investigates it. (20-22)

It is sad that many people will read all sorts of spiritual books but leave the Bible alone. Some off-shoot book about Jesus comes on the market and it sells millions. For some reason society likes to read about "God" but they do not want to find out who He really is. Or, I want to talk about whether Jesus was married and had kids, but I do not want to talk about His crucifixion and Lordship.

Beyond that, a vast number of "Church" people today do not believe in the authority of Scripture. They will say that it contains the Word of God but is not wholly the Word of God. They will chop it up into pieces of which things are true and which are not. They will say it is a good moral guide, but not the Word of God. They will say Jesus was a good man, prophet, or teacher, but they will not say that He is the divine Son of God or that He bore our sins, rose again in a physical body, and is Lord of the universe. Basically, they approach the Bible as ancient literature only. That is all they *can* see because they do not have the Spirit.

I would like to revisit a theme we discussed earlier to sum up our confidence in the Word of God. I, myself, because of my trust in the providence of God, as well as the massive amounts of manuscripts available, believe that the Bible we have today is what the original writers penned. So, the Bible is God's Word from cover to cover. Archer supports that, "Is there objective proof from the surviving manuscripts of Scripture that these sixty-six books have been transmitted to us with such a high degree of accuracy as to assure us that the information contained in the originals has been perfectly preserved? The answer is an unqualified yes" (p. 29-30). Sir Frederic Kenyon helps us out,

The interval then between the dates of original composition and the earliest extant evidence becomes so small as to be in fact negligible, and the last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed. Both the *authenticity* and the *general integrity* of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established. (p. 288)

I will close with a timely passage from Isaiah, “But this is the one to whom I will look, to the humble and contrite in spirit, who tremble at my word” (66:2).

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