

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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The Bible Today: It's Divine Inspiration

If you were to meet a man with a lighted candle and when you asked him what he was doing he replied, "I am trying to ascertain if the sun is shining", what would your reaction be? You would probably conclude that the man was in need of a brain surgeon, or at the very least he was a candidate for certification. Yet that is not too much of an exaggeration of the person who casts doubt upon the divine inspiration of the Holy Scriptures. Just as the sun is its own proof that it is shining, so the Bible is its own proof of its divine authorship. The true Christian has no doubt of this but our purpose today is to confirm the truth of such a contention for the benefit of any who might have some doubt about it.

To reveal God

When we speak of Divine authorship the meaning is surely obvious, we are saying that God is the writer, and when we speak of inspiration we mean that what was written were the very words of God Himself, He inbreathed them. As the Bible itself puts it "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God" 2 Timothy 3:16. When you are going to read a book, I presume that, like the vast majority of people you start at the beginning. Very well; take your Bible and open at the first chapter and take notice of the first clause: what does it say? "In the beginning God". There you have the great clue to the comprehension of the Bible. Its great purpose is to reveal GOD. Who could do that? Certainly no man could do it, he does not know enough about his neighbour to write a comprehensive account about him. No; if God is to be revealed there is only one who is able to do it and that is God Himself. Hence there can be only one conclusion and that is that the Bible is God's workmanship, it is divinely inspired.

Inspiration

Professor Louis Gausson has given what I believe is a very good definition of inspiration. He describes it as "that inexplicable power which the Divine Spirit put forth of old on the authors of holy Scripture, in order to their guidance even in the employment of the words they used and to preserve them alike from all error and from all omission." In speaking of 'authors' Professor Gausson is, of course, referring to the various amanuenses whom God employed. Sometimes the expression 'plenary inspiration' is used and we believe that such is a good description for it means entire, absolute and unqualified. Moreover the Bible is not inspired in a general overall way but the very words are inspired. Paul the apostle says "Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Spirit teacheth." 1 Corinthians 2:13. Some passages in Scripture are the sayings of men, some of them wicked men, Nebuchadnezzar for instance: much of the Book of Ecclesiastes is a record of what the wisest of men, King Solomon, saw "under the sun" and if its precepts were followed might lead to infidelity. But they are written down accurately by the Holy Spirit and have a purpose in view, and as such they are inspired. It has been suggested that those of us who hold to a divine inspiration of Scripture believe that we portray God as a kind of executive dictating to his secretary; but this is not so. Reading the Bible attentively will show the fallacy of such a theory. A single dictator would produce in all his work the same style of composition, but in the Bible different modes of language can be detected throughout the different range of writers. The compilation of the Holy Scriptures is very wide ranging. Among its pages we will find history, poetry, prophecy, true stories of love and romance, instruction, law and order etc. The Divine Author may have used some forty different individual writers in the production of His completed word: amongst them were shepherds, kings, fishermen, a herdman, a tax collector, a doctor, men of rank, academics well taught in the schools of the day and others: all were used in the recording of the divine word but they all had their various characteristics, and their style and stamp were not overridden but were allowed by their User. So, we have in our hands God's book and its contents tell us all that He would have us to know. It cannot be added to or subtracted from. But here we might insert a word of caution or indeed of warning. I, myself, have heard a true Christian say that the Bible contains the Word of God clearly implying that it also contains other matter, which was not the Word of God. Probably there were passages of Scripture that he could not understand, and this was his way of overcoming the difficulty. This will not do. All the Scripture is God's word and if we begin chopping out those passages that we do not understand or that are not to our liking, very soon we will have no Bible left.

Let us now consider two aspects of inspiration and the evidence, which may be adduced to each. What I have in mind is firstly the external evidence and secondly the internal.

External Evidence

Sales

If we consider the Bible objectively there is much testimony to the fact that it is no human production. Firstly there is the appeal that it has, as evidenced by its sales. I am not able to give the figures pertaining to the number of Bibles or portions thereof that are sold annually but I do know that the Gideons International, an organisation that addicts itself to the promulgation of it, are responsible for the purchase of 52 million copies each year; and that is only a fraction of the total. And this happens every year, it is the best seller. No other book is so sought after.

Translations

Secondly it is, by far, the most translated book ever to appear in a language other than its original. The latest figures that I have are dated 1994, but apart from being a little out of date they confirm the truth of what I have said. In 1994 the whole Bible had been translated into 341 languages, the New Testament into 822 languages and portions of the Bible (e.g. the Gospel of John) into 929 languages; a total of 2,092. God desires that His Word may be heard and read and these facts show how He is bringing it about.

Archaeology

Thirdly, there is the testimony of archaeology. The spade is constantly bringing to light evidence that the things stated in the Bible are true despite the fact that history knows nothing about them. The Bible records that Belshazzar was king of Babylon when it was overthrown by Darius the Mede. His name did not appear in the list of kings of Babylon that had been discovered by the archaeologists covering that period. It did however list a certain king Nabonidus who was reigning at the very time of the conquest. "The Bible is wrong" cried the critics. But the omniscient God is never wrong and in 1854 Sir Henry Rawlinson discovered some terra-cotta cylinders which referred to Belshazzar being the eldest son of Nabonidus, thus proving that Belshazzar did exist. Then in 1876 Sir Henry found a further number of tablets which stated that Nabonidus was actually a prisoner of the Persians at the time of Babylon's downfall and also refers to King Belshazzar. It is evident therefore that during his father's absence as a prisoner Belshazzar was reigning as regent. The Bible was proved correct.

Comparisons

Sometimes those who seek to denigrate the Bible ask "What about all the sacred books of other religions"? and so fourthly, I would say, that a comparison of these books with the Bible would only strengthen our contention that the Bible is of divine and not human origin. These 'sacred' books chiefly emanate from the East and the only ones that demand serious consideration are:

1. The Veda of the Hindus.
2. The Zend – Avesta of the Zoroastrians.
3. The Cofucian Texts of the Chinese.
4. The Tripitaka of the Buddhists.
5. The Koran of the Mohammedans.

The first four of these date from around 500/600 BC whilst the last is about 600 AD. To these might be added The Book of Mormon which is from the Western Hemisphere and of much more recent origin. I cannot pretend to have made a study of these books for myself but I can say, on the authority of reliable students who have, that their content and the teaching, of them does not begin to compare with that of the Bible. They are full of superstition and absurdities, they advocate that the practitioner of the religion they represent has to spend his life in striving for a better condition of life which might be reincarnation probably in another form or even, in the case of Buddhism, annihilation, termed the attainment of Nirvana. The writers of these books are largely unknown and some were put together more than a hundred years after the Founder had died. The historical basis for these writings is wholly wanting. What a difference to the sublime message of the Bible with its factual basis, its revelation of a God of love, it's wonderful message of salvation and eternal bliss for all who will accept it, and all by the grace of God and not by the effort of the beneficiary. To compare the Bible to these 'sacred' books is like comparing the Koh-I-noor Diamond to a piece of coke.

Effect of the Bible

Fifthly, the effect that the Bible has had on both individuals and peoples where it has been read and taught is nothing less than miraculous and gives further evidence to its Divine inspiration. Have you ever heard of a hardened criminal in his cell picking up a copy of Darwin's Origin of Species, or of Shakespeare's plays, reading either of them and becoming a changed man, and that for good and permanently. But I have heard of many and met some, who have

read a Bible and become just that. What was it that William Carey took to India and Hudson Taylor took to China? It was the Bible and from it they preached its message to the people that lived in those lands and the effect that it had is immeasurable.

Internal Evidence

Now let us consider the internal evidence for inspiration that is the Bible's own claim.

Harmony of Scripture

Firstly there is what we might call the harmony of Scripture. This book was compiled over a period of some 1,500 years and, as we have said, had many writers. One would have thought that somewhere within its 66 books one or more of them would have got out of line, expressed a different thought, given different facts or in some way contradicted what another writer had said perhaps some 500 years earlier. But no; without any editorship those books have been brought together into one volume, one harmonious whole. Surely any honest, reasonable person must acknowledge that in the human realm such would be impossible and that the only way it could be achieved is by Divine workmanship.

Contradictions?

Another criticism which is often heard and to which great credence is given because it was loudly proclaimed by the Higher Critics is that the Bible contradicts itself. I remember when I was at school my headmaster voiced this during one of his classes. In my youthful temerity I asked if he could give me an example and, of course, he could not as indeed most opposers of Scripture cannot. I agree that a casual reading of Scripture might indicate a contradiction, but a thorough study of the passages involved and their contexts will always show that the error is on the reader's side. Let me give a simple example. There are four gospels in the New Testament each one giving an account of the death of our Lord and each one giving the statement placed by Pilate on the Cross. Matthew states, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews": Mark, "The King of the Jews": Luke, "This is the King of the Jews": John, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews". "There you are" cry the critics "all different, clear evidence that the Bible contradicts itself". But any perceptive reader will very soon realise that not all the evangelists quote the statement in full. Each one had a specific theme to his gospel and quoted from the inscription accordingly. No doubt the full text would have read "This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews".

Inerrant

Thirdly I would contend that the Bible is completely free of error, which such a book under human authorship would hardly be, given the scope of its coverage. One simple example. Up until the 15th century all the world thought that the earth was flat. However in 1492 Christopher Columbus sailed to the New World and back again and men realised that the flat earth theory was a fallacy. Now the Bible had been in circulation for 500 years prior to that date and in it in Isaiah 40:22 we read "He who sitteth upon the circle of the earth". How may such a phrase be explained apart from the sphericity of the earth. The truth of the Scriptures predated the mistakes of men.

Prophecy

Fourthly the Bible abounds in prophetic utterances including those that have been fulfilled and those yet to be fulfilled. To deal with this aspect of inspiration would require a whole lecture if not two or three, but if you are in doubt about Biblical inspiration take your Bible and study in depth what it has to say about the Jewish nation. It will be a formidable task but I am convinced that such a study will convince any unbiased mind. Such are some of the prophecies of Daniel which were fulfilled in the subsequent 400 years that the Higher Critics asserted that the Book of Daniel was written after the events prophesied therein had come to pass.

The Lord's Estimate

Fifthly we have our Lord's own estimate of the Scriptures that He possessed, and they, of course would be only the Old Testament. He frequently quoted from the Pentateuch asserting such to be the writings of Moses. He referred to Noah and the flood, to Abraham, to Sodom, to Elijah and many more always accepting that what was written was the truth and that of God.

Subject Matter

Lastly the Bible treats of subjects which are not handled in any other treatise. Where, for instance, may we learn of the Eternal, Triune God; the one who is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, holy and infinitely righteous; the moral history of man from his innocency to his sinnership; the question of sin itself; the spiritual needs of man and how they

may be met? All this and much, much more is found in the Bible and in no other book. Why? Because these are divine truths which only God can reveal.

Here we have a book, extraordinary in every way, a book with which no other, be it philosophy, science, history, literature of any other subject can compare. There is a gulf between it and them which cannot be fathomed, and as befitting the One who is its author it is couched in language which is both majestic and sublime.

Guidelines

I think that I must end this discourse by offering, humbly and with some trepidation, two guidelines for those of my listeners who accept the divine inspiration of the Bible and who would desire, by study, to learn more of its deep truths. I direct your attention to Paul's advice to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:15, "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." I can well imagine someone asking the question, "Study; yes but which translation should I choose to study?" That is a good question and an important one. Today we have in the English language a positive plethora of translations. Which one should I choose? The original languages of the Scriptures were, for the Old Testament Hebrew, with a few very short portions in Aramaic, and Greek for the New Testament. The original manuscripts or autographs as they are called no longer exist. But God in his goodness has allowed a vast number of manuscripts, copies of the originals or copies of copies to be handed down and from these, and most scholars will agree, an accurate replica of the originals may be devised. The problem comes with the translation. There are basically what we may term two philosophies of translation. The first is the literal that is the translators gave an exact as possible rendering in English to each WORD in the Hebrew or the Greek. The result would be a translation into English as near as possible to that of the original rendering. The second is a method of translation which has only been introduced in recent years, and has been adopted by scholars who no longer believe in the inerrancy of Scripture. It is known as the dynamic method and consists of putting down in English what the translator thinks that Moses or David or Paul had in their minds when they penned the words given to them by the Holy Spirit. I think that this is a very unsafe way of producing a translation of the Scriptures. As we have already seen God spoke in words and surely it is the translator's responsibility to tell us what those words mean. Our Authorised Version was translated on the literal equivalence method and still remains, despite its age, one of the best and most majestic productions. Of course it has its imperfections which have been recognised by the recovery of further manuscripts during the past 400 years but it is still reliable on every fundamental, and indeed on almost every other issue. On the other hand the dynamic translations may be called into question on many passages within their covers.

The second part of the verse quoted from 2 Timothy exhorts us to "rightly divide the word of truth" to which I would add 2 Peter 1:20, "No prophecy of Scripture is of private interpretation". I think that the thrust of these two passages is that we should firstly seek to understand any passage within the context where it appears, and secondly not to draw the meaning of a passage in isolation from other scriptures. The Bible, The Word of God, The Scripture of Truth is one.

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