

BIBLE DOCTRINES

A PENTECOSTAL PERSPECTIVE

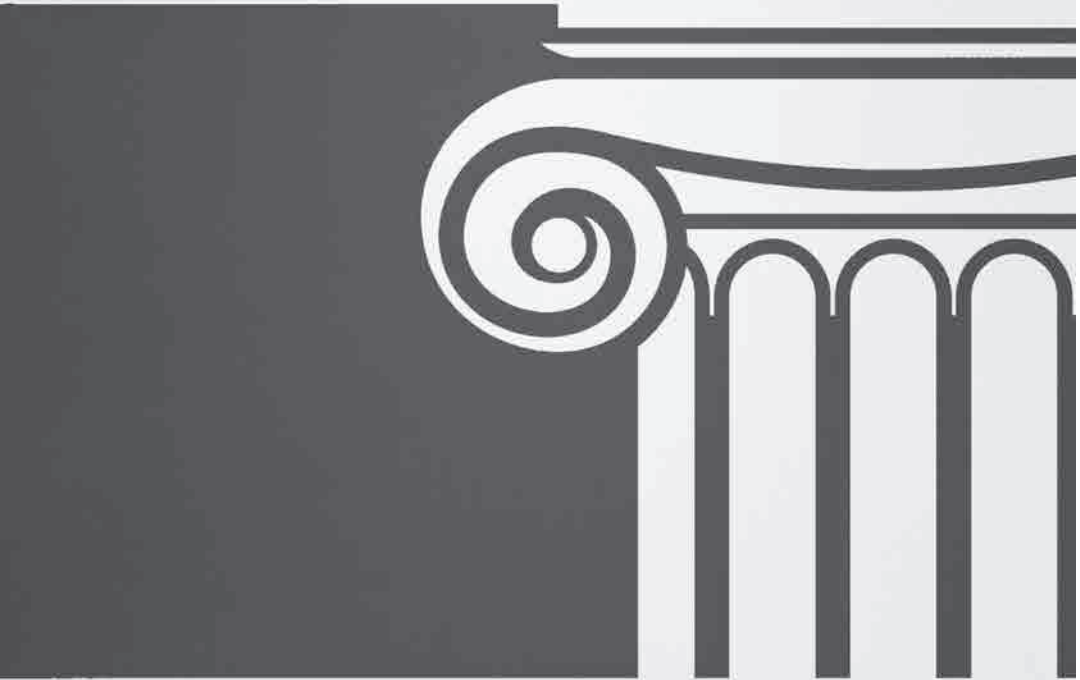


WILLIAM W. MENZIES & STANLEY M. HORTON

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LOGION®
P R E S S

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CHAPTER ONE

The Scriptures Inspired

THE AUTHORITATIVE RULE

“How can I know which is the true religion?” is an important question frequently asked. It is deserving of an answer, since one’s eternal welfare is at stake. The real issue is the matter of authority.

There are three basic kinds of religious authority: (1) human reason, (2) the Church, and (3) God’s Word. Perhaps the most common today is human reason. We will not dispute the obvious fact that human beings have mental equipment which has produced an amazing array of breath-taking achievements, particularly in scientific fields. Nor will we brush aside the need for handling one’s daily affairs in a logical fashion. The process of dealing with problems in a commonsense fashion is rationality. It is no sin to function on this level. Rationality, however, must not be confused with rationalism. Rationalism is the belief that the highest authority is human reason. Given enough time, the rationalist contends, human genius will unlock all the secrets of the universe and lead to perfect life, peace, health, wealth, and continuing prosperity.

One form of rationalism is a scientism that believes science, with its modern methodologies and equipment,

will eventually be able to analyze and solve all problems. However, such a view has severe limitations. It fails to recognize that science is not able to deal with some things. For example, it cannot work directly with the qualities of color and sound. It has to express them in quantitative terms. But qualities are not quantities. For example, people who are born blind can understand all the science and mathematics of the wave lengths of light. That does not mean they have any idea of what a beautiful sunset, a red rose, or the exquisite coloring of a butterfly's wing looks like. Those born deaf can understand all the science and mathematics of sound waves. That does not mean they have idea what a symphony or a congregation of people praising God and glorifying Jesus in the Holy Spirit sound like. Science cannot deal with things that cannot be weighed or measured, such as the human soul. Neither can it deal with unique occurrences. Consequently, it cannot deal with miracles, since each one is a distinct and separate manifestation of the grace and power of God and not repeatable for lab analysis.

Actually, those who take rationalism as their authority usually end up making their own reason the final authority. Bust as Solomon observed, "There is nothing new under the sun," for this same kind of arrogance displayed itself in ancient times. In Genesis 11 we read about those who attempted to defy God and make a name for themselves by building a city and a very high tower at Babel. Rationalists of all ages are much like that—putting their ultimate trust in their own reasoning ability. Again, repeatedly in the days of the Judges, "everyone did as he saw fit" (Judg. 17:6; 21:25). The chaos and confusion resulting from trust in human reason as the ultimate authority are vividly portrayed in the tragic stories recorded in the Book of Judges.

A second common belief is that the Church is the ultimate authority. Some contend that Christ gave His authority to Peter and that Peter laid hands on the bishops he ordained, giving them authority to lay hands on their successors. By this "apostolic succession," authority was transmitted from Christ through the twelve apostles and so down through the centuries. On this ground, certain churches hold themselves aloft as the only authorized

representative of Christ, and hence its leaders are supposed to hold a special authority to judge truth.

Commonly associated with this view of apostolic succession is the assertion that the New Testament is a product of the Church, giving the Church a kind of priority over the Bible. It should be noted, however, that the theory of apostolic succession did not appear until near the end of the second century A.D. Furthermore, the Council of Carthage in A.D. 397 did not authorize the list of New Testament books that we today accept as canonical; it merely gave assent to what was already generally recognized and used in the churches of the day. The death of Christ put the new covenant into effect (Heb. 9:15–17). After His resurrection, Christ and the Holy Spirit brought the Church into being. Then, the Holy Spirit inspired the writers who gave us the New Testament books. Today, since there are disputes and quarrels among ecclesiastical bodies, the questioning heart yearns for an authority higher than an earthly church organization.

The third alternative is to trust implicitly in the authority of the Word of God. This view is based squarely on the conviction that God by nature is self-disclosing.¹ He is a speaking God; He wishes to communicate with His creatures. Hebrews 1:1–2 indicates this characteristic in God: “In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.”

God has spoken. His fullest and final declaration, as Hebrews 1:1–2 indicates, is in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ. We call this manner of speaking the Incarnation, the clothing of the divine with human flesh. It is the fullest measure by which God can communicate with us, for it is person-to-person communication. Jesus Christ, as the first chapter of John’s Gospel reminds us, is “the Word,” the messenger and the message of God. Now, just as Christ is

¹ The key difference between other religions and Christianity is that other religions see humanity in the dark seeking for something within themselves or beyond themselves. Christianity reveals God bringing light into the darkness as He comes down into the stream of human life and history and reaches out in love for fallen human beings.

the Living Word, so the Bible is the written Word. In the absence of the personal presence of Jesus from the time of His ascension until His second coming, the Bible is the authoritative speaking of God, which the Holy Spirit is pleased to use to direct people to Christ. The apostle Paul in Romans 10:8–15, dramatically points out that without the proclamation of the Good News—the message of the Bible—people do not find God. It alone provides the grounds from which with the belief of the heart we confess “Jesus is Lord,” bringing salvation.

THE REVELATION OF GOD TO HUMANKIND

If one grants that God does speak, is the Bible the only medium of His speaking? God also makes himself known, to an extent, to all people (1) through creation and (2) through conscience. This manner of God’s speaking is usually called general, or natural, revelation. Romans 1 and 2 outlines this kind of utterance God has employed. Romans 1:20 speaks of the knowledge of God that all people everywhere can gather from their acquaintance with nature: “Since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.” In other words, people should have known, and should know, that some little tin god could not have made the universe. Nor could the many pagan gods, represented as always fighting each other, have created the consistency, order, and beauty we find in nature. Who can deny the inspired expression of Psalm 19: “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.”

The Bible says God speaks through the individual’s conscience: “Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them” (Romans 2:14–15). The very fact that people everywhere have a conscience, an idea of right and wrong that is in

line with the Bible, shows that there is authority beyond the individual and the circumstances. Even people who have rejected the Bible retain a conscience, though it will operate on the basis of what they have come to believe is the right thing for them to do.

God has spoken externally in the universe He created, and internally in the conscience of every individual. However, the tragedy recorded in Romans 1 and 2 is that mankind, given the glimmering of light available in the universe, has cursed God and rebelled against Him. Even so, there is sufficient light so that none can claim that God has been unjust. The result is that people by their own willful rejection of the light of natural revelation consign themselves to eternal punishment. It is not God who sends people to hell. It is people who demand that God leave them alone so they may go their own way and attempt to fulfill their own desires who send themselves to hell. When God sadly, reluctantly, leaves them to their own devices, perversion and destruction and hell are the grim, inevitable prospect. Therefore, natural revelation is inadequate by itself if fallen human beings are to be helped.

A special revelation, a message carried only in the Bible, is the wonderful news that God has invaded the human situation, acted to redeem us, and offered a way by which we can enter into that redemption. Nature and conscience do not disclose this. The Old Testament points ahead to the coming Redeemer; the New Testament tells of His coming and interprets its meaning.

THE VERBALLY INSPIRED WORD OF GOD

The Greek word most nearly equivalent to our word “inspiration” is found in 2 Timothy 3:16. It is *theopneustos*. It means, literally, “God-breathed.” By divine breath and power the Holy Spirit moved the (human) authors of the Bible with such precision that the product accurately reflects the intention of God himself. As God spoke through prophets and apostles, the original documents they produced bear the special marks of divine inspiration. This means that the sixty-six books in the canon, which

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make up the Bible, in their original expression are entirely trustworthy as the voice of the Holy Spirit. (See 2 Pet. 1:17–21.)

Several points should be kept in mind regarding the manner of inspiration. Mechanical dictation holds that God spoke through human beings to the extent that their individual personalities were suppressed. Such a view is erroneous. Personalities and particular vocabularies of the various writers are obviously distinguishable; of the forty-plus writers of Scripture, a variety of walks of life are clearly observable—shepherds, statesmen, priests, fishermen, the well-educated and the relatively unlearned. The writers were not, robot-like, manipulated while in trances; God did not pick them at random and tell them to write. For example, God set Jeremiah apart to be a prophet and began preparing him while he was still in his mother’s womb (Jer. 1:5). God took all the writers of Scripture through experiences, preparing them in such a way that He could use them to bring out the truth in exactly the way He wanted. In this way, the integrity of the writers as individual personalities was carefully preserved by the special acts of inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit. At the same time, the fruit of their writing is unmistakably the Word of God. The Holy Spirit “prompted the original thought in the mind of the writers (Amos 3:8). He then guided their choice of words to express such thoughts (Exod. 4:12,15); and, lastly, He illumines the mind of the reader of such words in a way that the reader potentially may comprehend the same truth as was originally in the mind of the writer (1 Cor. 2:12; Eph. 1:17–18). Thus both thought and language are revelatory and inspired.”²

Another widely-held view of inspiration is known as dynamic inspiration. This view conceives of the Bible as not being intended to convey “propositional truth”³ about God himself; advocates of this idea say this because they have concluded that God is unknowable. They say He is

² *Where We Stand* (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Publishing House, 1990), 7.

³ By “propositional truth” we mean real, objective, rational information.

“totally other”⁴ and discloses only truth about how we ought to live.

This is also termed functional interpretation of inspiration since it says the Bible can reveal nothing about what God is, but can reveal only His work. It is at the heart of many of the modernistic, or theologically liberal, systems that deny the supernatural. It lends itself to the idea that the Bible is basically folklore, but insofar as it talks about how to live rightly, it speaks meaningfully to people. In this view, ethics supplants doctrine. It opens the door to relativism, since objective standards of truth are largely washed away. People then interpret on their own what they think is proper to accept and what they wish to reject as merely folklore (cf. *Judg.* 17:6).

A variation of this view is the emphasis on salvation-history. In this view, there is a clear acknowledgment that God has acted in history in saving ways. This view accepts the Bible as a record of such divine activity, but claims it is a merely human record: open to the errors of human judgment, limited by the experience and the worldview of the (human) writers, and subject to (unaided) human interpretation of divine activity. The one big point where this view is on the right track is when it accepts the Bible as a record of supernatural events in which God acts in history to redeem people. Its major failure is in not seeing that even the interpretation of such events is inspired by the Holy Spirit. If this were not so, we would still be left in the dark, since events by themselves are filled with ambiguity; there is not complete revelation until they are interpreted authoritatively.

What does the Bible itself teach about the true manner of inspiration? It emphasizes the actual inspiration of the writers. In some cases God spoke to them in an audible voice. In some cases He gave them revelation in dreams and visions. Sometimes He spoke to their hearts and minds in a way that they knew it was God. *Amos* 3:8 emphasized this: “The lion has roared—who will not fear? The Sovereign Lord has spoken—who can but prophesy?”

⁴ That is, they say God is infinitely different from human beings and therefore unknowable.

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Jeremiah at one point decided he would quit prophesying; it seemed no one was listening. God's word in his heart, however, became like a burning fire shut up in his bones, and he could not stop (Jer. 20:9). No wonder statements such as "this is what the Lord says" occur 3,808 times in the Old Testament alone. Second Peter 1:20–21 shows us that no writer of Scripture ever depended on his own reasoning or imagination in the writing process: "Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." "Carried along" might sound as if they were in the midst of the stream of the Holy Spirit and were carried along. But an examination of the Scriptures shows that God taught them and led them along. (See Exod. 4:15) And going back to 2 Timothy 3:16, one can clearly see that the inspiration of Scripture also extends to the words and to the entirety of the text of the original documents, or autographs, of these men.

Jesus accepted the full inspiration of the entire Old Testament with His sweeping declaration, "Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35; see also Matt. 5:18). This view we call plenary (full), verbal (extending even to the words) inspiration. Romans 3:2 is in accord with this view when it cites the Old Testament as the "very words of God." So is Hebrews 3:7–11 when it quotes Psalm 95:7–11, not giving as a human author, but introducing the quotation with "as the Holy Spirit says ..."

One may ask, That is very well for the Old Testament, but what about the New Testament? Jesus went from village to village teaching. Undoubtedly He repeated many things as He went from place to place. Consequently, He left a body of teaching, promising His disciples, "the Holy Spirit ... will remind you of everything I have said to you" (John 14:26). This body of teaching was passed along to the Church by the apostles (Acts 2:42). From it also the Holy Spirit directed the writers of the Gospels to select material that would be beneficial to those they wrote to. For example, Luke tells us that he "carefully investigated everything" (Luke 1:3); we can be sure he was moved

by the Holy Spirit to do this. Thus in the Apostolic Age a process of revelation was going on. Christ was the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. Necessary for the generations to come was the record of His virgin birth, His teachings, His death and resurrection (recorded in the Gospels); the account of the institution of the Church with patterns normative for the whole Church Age (recorded in the Book of Acts); an explanation of the meaning of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, with practical help for the churches (recorded in the Epistles); and a glimpse into the consummation of the age (recorded in the Book of Revelation).

That the apostles recognized the propriety of a new covenant, or testament, is borne out by such passages as 2 Peter 3:15–16: “Bear in mind that our Lord’s patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.” Notice the expression, “the other Scriptures.” Here is clear testimony to the belief of Peter in the seventh decade of the first century that Paul was writing material that was on a plane with Old Testament Scripture. Paul also declares in some places that he has a word of the Lord, that is, a saying of Jesus, to back up what he writes. (See 1 Cor. 11:23; 1 Thess. 4:1–2, 15.) But even though he does not always say this, that does not mean that what he writes is any less inspired of the Holy Spirit. (Cf. 1 Cor. 7:12.)

The Bible teaches us regarding itself that the Holy Spirit so moved upon prophets and apostles that even the words themselves in the original documents are fully authoritative. If the words were not inspired, then people would be free to change them to fit their own ideas. Therefore, inspiration of the words was necessary to protect the truth. Jesus indicated the importance of every word by saying: “Until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter [the Hebrew letter yod], not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished” (Matt. 5:18).

THE INFALLIBLE RULE

The divine source and authority of the Scripture assure us that the Bible is also infallible, that is, incapable of error and therefore not capable of misleading, deceiving, or disappointing us. Some writers make a distinction between inerrancy (“exempt from error”) and infallibility, but they are very near synonyms. “If there is any difference in the shade of meaning between the two terms, inerrancy emphasizes the truthfulness of Scripture, while infallibility emphasizes the trustworthiness of Scripture. Such inerrancy and infallibility apply to all of Scripture and include both revelational inerrancy and factual inerrancy. It is truth (2 Sam. 7:28; Ps. 119:43,160; John 17:17,19; Col. 1:5).”⁵

Humanistic unbelief is the real source of objections to the authority and infallibility of the Bible. Its arguments are not new. Ancient writers such as Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Augustine had to combat some of them and in doing so declared their own confidence in the Scriptures. The reformers Zwingli, Calvin, and Luther also accepted the full authority of Scripture.⁶ Over the years unbelieving critics have made extensive lists of what they called discrepancies in the Bible, and some have claimed the Bible was indisputably in error. In 1874 J.W. Haley did a thorough study that is still worth reading.⁷ He classified these alleged discrepancies and found they arose from several causes:

1. A failure to read exactly what the Bible says.
2. False interpretations of the Bible, especially those which fail to take into account ancient customs and modes of speech.
3. Wrong ideas of the Bible as a whole and a failure to recognize that the Bible on occasion records the words of Satan and of evil people. For example, God told Job’s friends, “You have not spoken of me what is right” (Job 42:8). But the Bible gives a true record of what they said, even though they were wrong.

⁵ *Where We Stand*, 7–8.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁷ John W. Haley, *Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988).

4. A failure to recognize that some accounts are condensations of what was said or done.

5. Chronological difficulties due to the fact that Babylonians, Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans all used different systems of measuring time or dating. Even Israel and Judah sometimes differed in their methods of counting kings' reigns.⁸

6. Apparent discrepancies in numbers due to the fact that some passages use round numbers, others give more exact figures, depending on the purpose of the writer.

7. In some places copyists' errors crept into certain ancient manuscripts. A comparison of manuscripts has corrected most of these errors. (In fact, most scholars agree on what was the original reading in the vast majority of the cases.⁹ Furthermore, those cases where we cannot be sure do not affect the teachings of the Bible in any way.)

8. Finally, some so-called discrepancies were just a matter of a Hebrew or Greek word having more than one meaning, just as some of our English words do (e.g., compare "lead" in "lead weight" and "lead the blind").

One after another, alleged mistakes and discrepancies have been proved false. Again and again new discoveries by archaeologists and other scholars and scientists have shown that the so-called errors were errors of the critics due to their unbelief and insufficient knowledge.¹⁰

Some who deny the infallibility of Scripture nevertheless believe the Bible has value. That is, they say it does not matter whether the history and science of the

⁸ For a good discussion of this, see Edwin R. Theile, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1983).

⁹ R.K. Harrison and others, *Biblical Criticism: Historical, Literary and Textual* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1980), 150.

¹⁰ For example, Dr. Stanley Horton heard a Harvard professor say that sevenfold lamps were not in existence in Moses' time; therefore, the Bible was mistaken when it told of one being made and placed in the tabernacle (see Exod. 37:17-24). However, on an archaeological expedition at Dothan in 1962 with Dr. Joseph Free of Wheaton College, Dr. Horton watched workmen uncover a sevenfold lamp dating from 1400 B.C, right from the time of Moses. Stanley M. Horton, "Why the Bible is Reliable," *Pentecostal Evangel*, 14 January 1973, 8-11.

Bible are true. They say that a sinner can be saved without knowing the whole Bible or its claims to inspiration. It is true that the sinner does not need to know about the Virgin Birth, divine healing, sanctification, the baptism in the Holy Spirit, and the second coming of Christ in order to be saved. But once a person becomes a believer, such teachings will become the means of becoming mature in the faith (cf. Heb. 5:11 to 6:2).

For those who are troubled by what they consider the imprecision of the Bible in describing natural phenomena, they should realize that scientific language and terminology have developed only in modern times. Moreover, each science develops its own vocabulary. For example, the word “nucleus” means one thing to the biologist and quite another thing to the astrophysicist. Even ordinary words can be given new meanings by scientists. To the botanist, for example, the word “transpire” means “to give off moisture through pores (stomata).” Consequently, the Bible uses nontechnical, everyday language; we can expect its use of terms such as “sunrise” and “sunset” to be just like ours, even though we now know that it is the movement of the earth that is taking place, not that of the sun. Nevertheless, when the Bible does make an authoritative, propositional statement, such as “God created the heavens and the earth,” we can be sure the Bible is infallible.

The Bible will not lead us astray. It is a wonderful revelation of God as our Creator and Redeemer; a personal God who loves us and is concerned about us; a God who has a plan, who sent His Son to die for us (1 Cor. 15:3), and who will continue to do His work until Satan is crushed, death destroyed, and a new heavens and earth established. The whole Bible shows that He is reliable, dependable, trustworthy, and that His very nature guarantees the authority, infallibility, and inerrancy of His Word.

THE CANON AND LATER TRANSLATIONS

Although it is asserted that the autographs were inspired by God, we no longer have them. (They were probably worn out by frequent use and repeated copying.) So how, then, can we trust the text we have in our modern

Bibles? The trustworthiness of our Bibles today is tied into canon history and the transmission and translation of the books of the Bible.

The word “canon” means “a rule, a standard, a measuring rod.” Therefore, a book considered canonical is a book that has met certain criteria, or standards. By the time of Jesus and the apostles the thirty-nine Old Testament books were solidly accepted by Judaism as inspired by God. Jesus repeatedly referred to the Old Testament, recognizing that God himself was speaking (e.g., Matt. 19:4; 22:29). To attest to the confidence the writers of the New Testament had in the Old, one need but consider that in the hundreds of quotations of Old Testament passages scattered throughout the New Testament, there is only one place where possibly an apocryphal (spurious or doubtful) Old Testament book is quoted. That single reference is in Jude 14–15, where there appears to be a similarity to the Book of Enoch 1:9, and even this is not difficult to attribute to a common oral tradition available both to the writer of the Book of Enoch and to Jude.

What of the New Testament canon? This is a fascinating story all its own, but let us move to the conclusion of the story, into the fourth century. In A.D. 367, the most orthodox theologian of the time, the great champion of biblical truth, Athanasius, sifted through all the books being circulated in the Mediterranean world purporting to be apostolic documents. His examination disclosed twenty-seven books, the ones we have today, to be God’s Word.¹¹ Thirty years later, quite independently of Athanasius, a church council met in Carthage to discuss the problem of what books were genuinely Scripture.¹² They applied four tests to the documents considered: (1) Apostolicity: Was the book the product of an apostle or a close associate of an apostle? (2) Universality: was the book widely accepted and used in the churches? (3) Contents: Did the subject matter of the book appear to be on a plan with known Scripture? (4) Inspiration: Did the book bear the special

¹¹ Everett F. Harrison, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1982), 108.

¹² *Ibid.*

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quality that speaks of divine inspiration? Note that three of the four tests to which the books were subjected were objective, a matter of factual evidence. Only the fourth, the matter of inspiration, could be considered subjective, a matter of personal judgment. The Council of Carthage, after considering the facts, concluded that the twenty-seven books we now have in our New Testament were the only books in circulation at that time that measured up to the criteria established. For all practical purposes, the question of canon was closed until the advent of modern rationalism.

The other question remaining about the trustworthiness of the Bible is the accuracy of the transmission of the text. Inspiration extends only to the autograph; no case is made for the inspiration of any particular translation (version) of the Bible. You may ask, Just how nearly does my Bible conform to the original documents inspired by God?

Let us look first at the New Testament, which is nearer to us in time than the Old Testament text. Most remarkable is that there are over 5,300 ancient hand-written copies (manuscripts) of the New Testament in the original Greek. Some come from the third and fourth centuries. One fragment of the Gospel of John comes from about A.D. 125, within 30 years of the time it was written. This is in contrast to other ancient writings. The oldest manuscript we have of Virgil comes from about 350 years after his death. The oldest of Horace is from 900 years after his death. Most of the manuscripts of Plato come from 1,300 years after his death.¹³ Sir Frederic Kenyon, noted biblical scholar, speaking of modern discoveries in biblical archeology, said, "They have established, with a wealth of evidence which no other work of ancient literature can even approach, the substantial authenticity and integrity of the text of the Bible as we now possess it."¹⁴

The Old Testament text has had a dramatic breakthrough in this century. With the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947, manuscripts of all or part of every Old Testament

¹³ Sir Frederic Kenyon, *The Story of the Bible*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1964), 26.

¹⁴ Sir Frederic Kenyon, *Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts*, 5th ed. rev. (London: Eeyle & Spottiswoode, 1958), 318–319.

book except Esther have been uncovered. They come from as early as 250 B.C., taking us back 1000 years earlier than the previous best manuscripts available in the Hebrew text. In fact, probably the most important contribution of the Dead Sea Scrolls is the light cast on the text of the Old Testament books. The net result is that we are given massive reassurance of the accuracy of our Bibles. They make possible the comparison of a large number of texts that let us know the Old Testament “has remained virtually unchanged for the last two thousand years.”¹⁵ In fact, there is remarkable conformity of the Dead Sea documents to our present-known texts.

God’s purpose in calling Abraham and choosing Israel as His servant (Isa. 44:1) was to prepare the way to bring blessing to all the nations of the earth (Gen. 12:3; 22:18). It was important therefore that the Bible be put into the various languages of other nations. All nations need the Bible because it is the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17); it is the only means of winning spiritual victories. It is also God’s hammer, His tool to break down opposition and to build God’s building (Jer. 23:29). It is a lamp to light life’s pathway (Ps. 119:105). Even when people are blinded by sin, and the Bible seems foolish to them, such “foolishness” still gives to preaching the wise and powerful content that the Holy Spirit uses to save those who believe (1 Cor. 1:18, 21). The Bible is also necessary for the continued growth of believers. Consequently, as soon as the Church began to spread into countries where they did not speak the original Hebrew and Greek of the Bible, Christians wanted the Bible translated into their own languages.

The story of Bible versions (translations) is thrilling.¹⁶ It actually begins before the time of Jesus. As a result of the conquests of Alexander the Great, Greek became the language of trade, commerce, and education in the Middle East. The city of Alexandria in Egypt became

¹⁵ Geza Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, 2d. ed. (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1975), 12.

¹⁶ Much of the following discussion of translations is taken from Stanley M. Horton, “Perspective on Those New Translations,” *Pentecostal Evangel*, 11 July 1971, 6–8.

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the great center of Greek language, learning, and culture. Jews living there wanted the Old Testament in Greek. Over the period of 250 to 150 B.C. they gave the world the famous Septuagint Version.¹⁷ This version was often used by early Christians in preaching the gospel during the first generation after Pentecost. (This is indicated by New Testament usage.) At the same time the Holy Spirit directed the writers of the New Testament to write their books, not in the classical Greek used several hundred years before by the great Greek philosophers, but in the everyday Greek spoken by the common people on the street and in the marketplace.

God has always wanted His Word to be preached in the language the people actually spoke. Moses wrote the Law not in the hieroglyphics used by the scholars of Egypt but in the Hebrew spoken in the tents of Israel. Jesus preached and taught with a simplicity of language that made the common people listen to Him with delight (Mark 12:37). When the gospel spread, people naturally began to translate the Bible into their own languages. Four centuries after Christ, when neither Greek nor the old Latin was spoken any longer in the Western Roman Empire, Jerome made a new translation into the “vulgar,” or “common,” Latin spoken in his day. This version became known as the Vulgate.¹⁸

Unfortunately, the Vulgate was made the official version of Western Europe and England. Further attempts to translate the Bible were discouraged even though in time the common people did not speak Latin at all. When in A.D. 1380 Wycliffe translated the Vulgate into English, large numbers were converted to Christ. But after his death in 1384, persecution of his followers arose due to their rejection of some Roman Catholic doctrines. In 1415 a general council of the Roman Catholic Church condemned his teaching. Then in 1428 Bishop Richard Fleming had his bones dug up, burned, and the ashes thrown into a

¹⁷ Gleason L. Archer, Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), 44.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 80.

stream.¹⁹ Most of the copies of his handwritten Bible were also burned.

God, however, was working. The invention of printing made a difference. Between 1462 and 1522 at least seventeen versions and editions of the Bible appeared in German. They helped prepare the way for the Reformation under Martin Luther, which brought to the people a scriptural understanding of salvation by grace through faith. Martin Luther himself then went to the Hebrew and Greek to make a new, better translation into German. As a result of Luther's influence, William Tyndale made the first important printed translation of the New Testament into English in 1525.²⁰ Many copies were burned but the printing presses kept pouring out floods of Bibles. Since they could not burn all the Bibles, they arrested Tyndale and burned him at the stake. Even so, other translations soon followed. After Henry VIII broke with the Roman Catholic Church, a translation known as the Bishop's Bible became the authorized version of the English Church. It was not popular, however, and most people preferred the Geneva Bible, a version translated by English refugees who fled from Catholic persecution to Switzerland. It was this version that was brought to America by the Pilgrims and Puritans in 1620 and 1630.²¹

Many English leaders recognized the need for a better translation, so King James I appointed several groups of scholars to revise the Bishop's Bible. It was an opportune time: The English language under the influence of Shakespeare and other literary giants, was at a new height. All the best English was poured into this revision, which was completed in 1611 and "authorized" by King James to be read in the churches of England; it ultimately became

¹⁹ Jack P. Lewis, *The English Bible/From KJV to NIV: A History and Evaluation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), 19–20; K.B. McFarlane, *John Wycliffe* (London: The English Universities Press, 1952), 106.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 20–21.

²¹ However, "John Alden's Bible, preserved in Pilgrim Hall at Plymouth Massachusetts, is a KJV." *Ibid.*, 32–33. See also Christopher Anderson, *The Annals of the English Bible*, abridged and continued by S.I. Prime. (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1849), 486.

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known as the King James Version (KJV). It was not only beautiful English; it was the English of the day. In fact, the KJV translators took pains to make the Bible more understandable to the common people than the previous English translations were. For example, they took the Israelite expression “Let the king live!” and translated it by the corresponding phrase then used in England: “God save the King!” In the New Testament, the Greek phrase meaning “Let it not be!” or “Do not let it happen!” is very emphatic—more emphatic than a literal translation would make it, so the KJV translators substituted a phrase the people would understand: “God forbid!” They also translated the Greek word *ekklēsia*, meaning “assembly” (an assembly of free citizens), by the more common word “church,” though they did translate it “assembly” in three passages (Acts 19:32,39,41).

Translating from one language to another has its own set of problems.²² There is, for example, no one Greek word for “miracle,” but two words contain that idea (*dunamis* and *sēmeion*). So the KJV translators used “miracle” for both; but for variety, and to bring out other shades of meaning, they also translated them as “powers” (Heb. 6:5), “mighty works” (Matt. 11:21–23), “strength” (Rev. 10:10), “might” (Eph. 3:16), “virtue” (Luke 6:19; 8:46), “mighty deed” (2 Cor. 12:12), “sign” (John 20:30), “wonder” (Rev. 13:13), and “token” (2 Thess. 3:17). Still another problem came from the fact that both Anglicans and Puritans practiced sprinkling for water baptism, and the Greek word *baptizō* means “plunge under,” “dip,” “immerse.” So the KJV translators did not translate the word. Instead, they transliterated the Greek word into English letters (thereby giving us the word “baptize”). In this way they avoided a controversy that might have kept

²² One of the problems missionaries face today is that in translating from one language to another it is often difficult to find exactly equivalent words in both languages. For example, Missionary John Hall told of a problem he had while translating the Bible into the Mossi language of Africa. The Mossi people had no word for “anchor.” They were an inland people who rode horses. They tied their horses to picketing pegs, so Hall translated the first part of Heb. 6:19: “Which hope we have as a ‘picketing peg’ for the soul which cannot be rocked loose or broken.”

some people from reading this new version of the Bible. At other times they were overliteral. For example, they took the Greek word *monogenēs* apart, translating *mono* as “only” and *genēs* as “begotten.”²³ However, the word in New Testament times had come to mean simply “only,” in the sense of unique, special. Hebrews 11:17 uses it of Isaac as the special, promised son, even though Abraham had another son, Ishmael. Though we become “sons” [children] of God through Christ, Jesus is God’s beloved Son in a special, unique sense that we never can be.

The richness of the Greek also is difficult to put into English. The KJV translators used one English word for a number of different Greek words. For example, they translated nine different Greek words as “abide,” twelve different ones as “bear,” five as “cast out,” thirty-one as “come,” twelve as “deliver,” fifteen as “keep,” nine as “mind,” six as “power,” six as “preach,” twelve as “think.” In each case, each Greek word represents fine shades of meaning. However, in English a great number of words would have to be used to describe the shade of meaning. This is one of the reasons commentaries and expanded or amplified translations are helpful.

In many cases, however, the KJV translators tried to bring out whatever shade of meaning is being emphasized in a particular passage.

GREEK WORD	TRANSLATIONS IN THE KJV
<i>ekballō</i>	“cast out” (John 6:37); “bring forth” (Matt. 12:25); “send forth” (Matt. 9:38); “send out” (James 2:25); “leave out” (Rev. 11:2)
<i>apolutrōsis</i>	“redemption” (Eph. 1:7); “deliverance” (Heb. 11:25)
<i>hislastērion</i>	“propitiation” (Rom. 3:25); “mercy seat” (Heb. 9:5)

²³ In Luke 7:12; 8:42; and 9:38, the KJV translators did use the word “only” instead of “only begotten.”

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GREEK WORD	TRANSLATIONS IN THE KJV
<i>hilaskomai</i>	“make reconciliation” (Heb. 2:17); “be merciful” (Luke 18:13)
<i>Amen</i>	“amen” (Deut. 27:15–26; Rom. 1:25); “so be it” (Jer. 11:5); “truth” (Isa. 65:16); “verily” (Matt. 5:18)
<i>anomia</i>	“iniquity” (Matt. 7:23); “transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4); “unrighteousness” (2 Cor. 6:14)
<i>hikanos</i>	“meet” (1 Cor. 15:9); “worthy” (Matt. 3:11); “sufficient” (2 Cor. 2:16); “able” (2 Tim. 2:2); “good” (Acts 18:18); “great” (Mark 10:46)
<i>apeitheō</i>	“disobedient” (Rom. 1:21); “unbelieving” (Acts 14:2)
<i>agapē</i>	“love” (John 15:9–10,13); “charity” (1 Cor. 1–13); “feast of charity” (Jude 12); “dear” (Col. 1:13)
<i>aiōnōn</i>	“ages” (Col. 1:26); “the beginning of the world” (Eph. 3:9)
<i>chrisma</i>	“anointing” (1 John 2:27); “unction” (1 John 2:20)
<i>sōzō</i>	“save” (Matt. 1:21); “heal” (Acts 14:9); “whole” (Matt. 9:21); “make whole” (Matt. 9:22); “preserve” (2 Tim. 4:18)
<i>elegchō</i>	“reprove” (John 16:8); “rebuke” (Rev. 3:19); “convict” (John 8:9); “convince” (John 8:46); “tell [his] fault”
<i>elpizō</i>	“hope” (1 Pet. 1:13); “trust” (Matt. 12:21)
<i>kairos</i>	“season” (Mark 12:2); “time” (Matt. 13:30); “opportunity” (Gal. 6:10)
<i>makarios</i>	“blessed” (Matt. 5:3–11); “happy” (John 13:17)
<i>marturia</i>	“witness” (John 1:7); “testimony” (John 3:32–33); “record” (John 1:19); “report” (1 Tim. 3:17)

GREEK WORD	TRANSLATIONS IN THE KJV
<i>homologeō</i>	“profess” (1 Tim. 6:12); “confess” (Matt. 10:32); “promise” (Matt. 14:7); “give thanks” (Heb. 13:15)
<i>paraklesis</i>	“consolation” (Rom. 15:5); “exhortation” (Acts 13: 15); “comfort” (Rom. 15:4); “entreaty” (2 Cor. 8:4)

Then because the Hebrew does not contain the word “have,” nor does it use many common English words, such as helping verbs or “to be” as connectives, the KJV translators added them and many other words to make the translation understandable and smooth reading in English. For example, they added the word “art” in Nathan’s words to David, “Thou art the man” (2 Sam. 12:7).²⁴ The result was an excellent translation in the language of the people who lived in England in 1611.

At first the KJV, as a new version, was rejected by many. The clergy preached against it. One Hugh Broughton went so far as to say “that it was so poorly done that it would grieve him as long as he lived. He insisted that he would rather be tied between wild horses and torn apart than to let it go forth among the people.”²⁵ For fifty years many continued to condemn it, but it gradually won favor because it was a superior translation. It was worthy of the place it came to have in the hearts of the people.

Unfortunately, all languages are constantly changing. We no longer speak Shakespearian English with its “thees” and “thous.” In fact, meanings of some words have changed considerably: “Let” in 1611 meant “hinder.” “Prevent” meant “precede.” “By and by” meant “immediately.” “Charger” meant “wooden platter.”

Missionaries want to get the Bible into the language the people actually speak. Believers everywhere are blessed when they read an easy-to-understand version in their

²⁴ Many (though by no means all) of these added words, which are necessary in English, the KJV translators put in italics.

²⁵ Lewis, *English Bible*, 29; cf. Hugh Broughton, *A Censure of the Late Translation for Our Churches*, ca. 1612 (S.T.C. 3847).

own language. The world, including the English-speaking world, is a mission field today. This is the reality that has called forth new versions in modern English. Admittedly, none of them are final perfection, but all, except those put out by some of the cults, have enough truth in them for the Holy Spirit to use them to make the way of salvation clear.

Some modern versions, such as the New Berkeley Version, use a high English style that seems to be aimed at college professors instead of the average reader. In contrast, the New Century Version is aimed at a third-grade reading level. Some, such as *The Good News Bible*²⁶, *The Living Bible*, the Phillip's translation, and the *New English Bible*, are paraphrases, which do more interpretation than strict translation. The Phillips translation seems to catch the spirit of the Greek, however, especially in Paul's epistles. The Revised Standard Version is fairly good in the New Testament, but the Old Testament is too subjective in the way it changes the Hebrew vowels and divides Hebrew words, so it is not useful as a study Bible. The New Revised Standard Version is an improvement over the earlier RSV. The *New American Standard Bible* is faithful to the original languages, but sometimes overliteral and not very readable. In between is the New International Version (NIV), which is a good translation made by Bible believers and is also very readable.²⁷ Whichever version you choose, it is important to seek out the full meaning of the original languages (Greek, Hebrew, Aramaic) using concordances, commentaries, Bible dictionaries, as well as comparing with other versions.

Reading a new translation may stimulate thinking. Comparing various translations also helps one to see the various shades of meaning that are in the Scripture. As Dr. Jack Lewis points out, "The religious problems of the world are not caused by people reading different translations; the most serious problem is that many read no translation."²⁸

²⁶ Today's English Version. Some Bible versions are published under more than one name.

²⁷ Several Assemblies of God scholars have been involved in some of the recent translations.

²⁸ Lewis, *English Bible*, 366.

The KJV is still a good translation and worthy of respect. Its beauty, especially in the Psalms, will probably never be surpassed. But the important thing is to get people to read the Bible. As the people read, the Holy Spirit will illuminate their hearts and minds and make the truth of God's Word real to them. In the providence of God, the inspired words of prophets and apostles of old have been preserved for us in the most remarkable of all books, the Holy Bible.

The Bible is a miracle of God's care. The Holy Spirit acted at the time of the first writing. This we call inspiration. He has preserved for us the text. Now, today, the same Holy Spirit who inspired the writers helps the reader and the hearer. The unregenerate is not promised this assistance, being blind to the truth of God (1 Cor. 2:14). But the believer is promised special assistance from the Holy Spirit (John 16:13–16; 1 Cor. 2:10). God wishes to speak to the reader—and His Spirit is pleased to shed light on the truth and its application to your life.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Why is rationalism insufficient as a basis for religious authority?
2. Why is the Bible a better basis for religious authority than the Church?
3. What does the Bible itself teach us about its inspiration?
4. How should we deal with alleged mistakes and discrepancies in the Bible?
5. What are the chief grounds for accepting the sixty-six books in our Bible as canonical and no others?
6. What are the chief reasons that over the centuries new versions (translations) of the Bible have been made?
7. Why is it important to get the Bible translated into the language people actually speak?
8. How can we receive the illumination of the Holy Spirit in Bible study today?

In order to know what is true, we must understand what is false. If we cannot tell the difference, we can be misled. Renowned scholars Stanley Horton and William Menzies have written *Bible Doctrines* from their vast insight and depth of biblical knowledge. This clear guide to Bible doctrines from a Pentecostal perspective will help you discern doctrinal truth from error.

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DIVINE HEALING

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