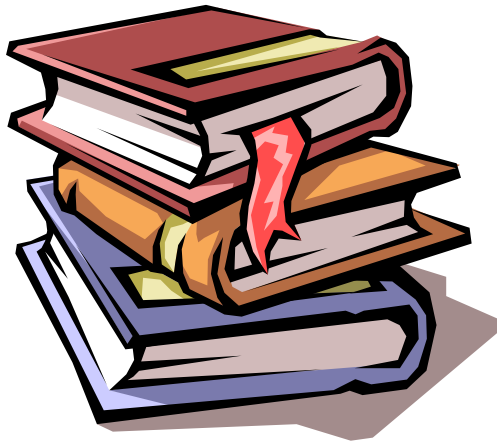


Progressing Together



DOCT 202

The Revelation and Inspiration of the Biblical Writings



E.R.B. - B.P. 10112
F-13425 MARSEILLE CEDEX 12
FRANCE
www.progressingtogether.org
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Syllabus for DOCT202 - Revelation and Inspiration

Certificate Level

Course objectives

To develop in elders, small group leaders and church planting pastors in newly responsive areas of the Arab world who have confidence in the Scripture as the Word of God, sufficient to guide him or her in their ministry.

Course description

This course examines in depth the place of the Bible in the believer's life, the process of the Bible's writing, numerous logical, historical and scientific arguments against the Bible, and concepts related to interpretation of Scripture. It becomes clear through the course that the believer's only firm foundation for knowing, understanding, and applying ultimate truth concerning physical and spiritual reality is God's revealed Word as found in the 66 books of the Bible.

Learning Outcomes

Content: By the end of the course, the student will be able:

- To differentiate between general revelation and special revelation.
- To understand the divine and human components of inspiration of the scriptures.
- To communicate the uniqueness of a Christian understanding of « inspiration » and the process of revelation.
- To explain the central role of the Bible as the authority for Christians, as opposed to tradition, to experience, to influential people, to reason, or to other sources of authority.
- To distinguish between the Word of God in the flesh (Jesus Christ) and the written word of God (the scriptures).
- To outline briefly the formation of the biblical canon (66 books of the OT and NT).

Character: By the end of the course, the student will be able:

- To express in a convincing manner why he believes that the Bible is the sole authority for his personal faith, i.e., that the Bible is the source, the guide in our life conduct, the guide concerning our beliefs, doctrine, and practice.

Competency: By the end of the course, the student will be able:

- To explain why no other book, philosophy, or scientific claim can abrogate the Bible or supersede its plain teachings.
- To respond to challenges to the authority of the Scriptures, especially accusations concerning textual variants and falsification of the Bible, through archaeological, historical, or scientific arguments.
- Teach a group of believers key points covered in this course.

Course requirements

Certificate Level

- To demonstrate knowledge of course material through
 - answering questions in each section
 - completion of the final exam
- To attend 18 of 20 instructor-led sessions (27 contact hours minimum)

- To participate in discussions by listening, contributing as appropriate, and responding when asked a specific question
- To sketch a timeline for the formation of the Christian scriptures
- To participate in a debate concerning an aspect of the authenticity of Christian scriptures
- To choose any subject related to the revelation or reliability of God's Word and write an essay, not exceeding five typewritten pages or 1500 words, discussing this subject
- To take 10 to 20 minutes and explain his or her essay to the class

Evaluation methodology and scale

- Student performance and mastery will be assessed according to the following scale:
 - 40% on completion of reading, of questions, and of assignments (15% on the essay and 5% on the presentation of it to the class)
 - 10% on student participation and attitude in discussions
 - 10% on attendance (percentage equals number of classes attended, divided by number of classes held, times ten)
 - 40% on the final written, or oral, exam.
- The evaluation scale is as follows
 - passing grade – 70-79%
 - good grade – 80-89%
 - excellent grade – 90% and above.

Credits earnable

- 2 hours of credit towards a Certificate in Christian Studies

Prerequisites

(Progressing Together DOCT201, or equivalent)

Textbook and related materials

- Required - Progressing Together Manual for DOCT202
Additional readings may be required at the instructor's discretion
- Recommended - any book containing at least a whole chapter dedicated to this subject of the revelation and importance of the Bible, such as those listed in the bibliography

Course methodology

The student will work inductively, reading texts, answering questions concerning knowledge, application and analysis, and drawing conclusions which will be applicable to local context. After answering the questions in each lesson, students will gather to discuss answers and practical application. When possible, the course leader will give additional talks to reinforce what the students are learning through the lessons.

Course schedule

To be announced.

Policies

- Cheating and plagiarism will not be tolerated, because it is deemed contrary to Christian teaching and academic integrity.
- Absences in excess of 3 class hours will lead to a reduced grade; no student missing more than 6 class hours will receive credit for the course. Students who show little or no interest in completing course work will first be warned, then asked to leave the course if they do not change their conduct.

Bibliography

- Grudem, Wayne. *Systematic Theology* (ماذا يفكر الإنجيليون في أساسات الإيمان المسيحي). Engles Publications: Cairo. 2002. Available in English and Arabic.
- Nicole, Jules-Marcel. *Précis de doctrine chrétienne*. Éditions de l'Institut Biblique: Nogent-sur-Marne. 2002.

Lesson 1: General Revelation

A. The necessity of a divine revelation

1. Read 1 Corinthians 2:11. Who alone can know all the things of God?
2. Read Isaiah 55:8-9 and note the reason given to explain why it is hard for man to know God by his own efforts.
3. The thoughts and ways of God are far above our thoughts. Man is limited by space and time. He is a creature, and because of this he is incapable of perfectly understanding his Creator.
4. Read Romans 11:33-36. What does this passage teach us about the ability of man to know God?

B. Revelation in nature

1. Read Psalm 19:1- 4. What reveals God?
2. Who is the recipient of this revelation?
3. Read Acts 14:16, 17. Describe other ways by which God testified to man that he exists.

But it is impossible for the creation to reveal everything about its Creator.

4. Read Romans 1:18-23.
 - a. What can one know about God from observing the creation (v. 20)?

b. What do men do when faced with this knowledge (Romans 1:18, 32a)?

c. What have men put in the place of the true knowledge of God?

C. Revelation through the conscience

1. Read Romans 2:12-15.

a. Where does conscience come from?

b. Can man consider his conscience to be like the voice of God?

c. By what criteria will God judge those who do not know his divine law?

2. Briefly discuss this question: Without the knowledge of Christ and the Gospel, do pagans and followers of other religions have enough knowledge of God to be eternally saved? Before answering, read John 14:6, Acts 4:10-12, Romans 10:12-15, and Ephesians 2:11-13.

Reading

The reading texts for lessons 1 to 5 are taken from the book *Précis de Doctrine Chrétienne* by J.M. Nicole, Éditions de l'Institut Biblique, 6ème édition, 2002, chapter 1 "La révélation". They are reproduced here with authorization. It is appropriate to read all the biblical references mentioned in parentheses in order to evaluate the statements of the author.

The necessity of a revelation

If we are destined to know God, we need God to reveal himself to us. This concerns realities which "no eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived" (1 Corinthians 2:9). Two kinds of

considerations are needed to show that we cannot bring ourselves to a correct understanding of God.

First, according to the old Latin adage, *"finitum non capax infiniti"*, meaning "that which translated means, is limited cannot embrace infinity". Naturally a bowl cannot contain anything larger than it is. Intellectually we cannot understand that which is greater than our intelligence. We do not know if mosquitoes have ideas the way humans have, but if they do, I imagine they are inadequate. This is even more true of us. We are so limited that we cannot discover God by drawing only on our own resources. Our intelligence is corrupted by sin. We sometimes try to understand God with our own minds. We think we are wise enough to do this, but God calls this foolish thinking. God must call our supposed wisdom "folly" when we try to understand him (Romans 1:21; 1 Cor.1:20). The case is even worse if we are narrow-minded.

These evident considerations are supported by proofs that are as distressing as they are certain. When men attempt to know God apart from his revelation, they always end in idolatry. The gods which men make and in which they put their confidence are appalling and weak.

Recall how the prophets ridiculed the idols of wood and stone. They were dressed and decorated and fixed in place so that they did not wobble, and yet they could do neither good nor bad (Jeremiah 10:1-9; Isaiah 44:1-20). Remember the remarks made by the apostle Paul. They were courteous but categorical and concerned the marvelous productions of Athenian sculpture. "We must not think that the true Divinity is like gold or silver or stone sculpted by art and the imagination of men"(Acts 17:29).

As on a fatal slope, the man who turns away from divine revelation always turns to worship the creature instead of the Creator (Romans 1:25). This is followed by disastrous moral and religious consequences. The God of "philosophers and wise men" (Pascal, Memorial) has less grotesque allures than the grimacing African statuettes of the Phoenician Baal that are said to protect from bad luck and bring good luck. They do not resemble the God who is living and true and who is manifested to us by Jesus Christ.

"God is in heaven and we are on earth" (Ecclesiastes 5:1). Heaven cannot be found in the path of our space engines or in the sight of our telescopes. It eludes all our investigations. But the goodness of God is revealed so that we can have a useful and exact knowledge of him.

Note: One would have to be extremely naïve to be impressed by Gagarin's statement that he did not meet God on board his sputnik. God is spirit (John 4:24) and the heaven of heavens cannot contain Him (1 Kings 8:27). The idea that he could be located somewhere in our interplanetary space is so ridiculous that it should not come to the mind of a person who reflects even a little.

General revelation

Needless to say, God has revealed Himself. He did this first in his work of creation.

Psalm 19:1 "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands."

Romans 1:20 "For 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.” This revelation has the advantage of being universal (Acts 14:16-17). Even those nations that God has allowed to follow their own way benefit from this incessant testimony. The creation testifies to the power of God, to his wisdom, and to his solicitude for his creatures. He feeds the birds, clothes the grass of the fields and takes special care of mankind, good and evil alike. He gives the sun, the rain, the fertile seasons and their produce (Mt. 6:26-30; 5:45; Acts 14:17). We are not often attentive to this grand sight. Job was so impressed by it that all his doubts evaporated when God reminded him of this. In Job 42:5 he exclaims, “Now my eyes have seen you.”

On the other hand, we must not forget the shortcomings of this natural revelation. If it is true that a piece of art testifies to the qualities of the artist, it can only do this in part. But above all, “the creation was subjected to frustration” (Romans 8:20). The ground was cursed because of Adam (Gen. 3:17). Even if all God made was very good (Genesis 1:31), everything was more or less spoiled by sin. Wonderful as it is, this is a damaged masterpiece we see around us.

We see clearly the incomparable hand of the divine author, but we also see the sinister effects caused by the adversary. Violence, catastrophes, and injustices are everywhere. These are troubling contradictions that distress and shock our world. In fact, natural revelation is more clearly a source of the condemnation of men than a means of salvation. It makes them without excuse, “for although they knew God, they neither glorified him nor gave thanks to him” (Romans 1:21). Today as in the past, it doesn’t stop them from turning away from the incorruptible God to give themselves to the worship of all sorts of idols.

The examination of the most diverse non-Christian religions strikingly confirms the declarations of the apostle Paul on this subject. To give details would take us away from our study. Suffice it to say that in all religious climates and throughout the centuries we almost always find in paganism the idea of a supreme god who is sovereign, just and good. However, the worship of these deities has given way to absurd and deviant religious practices.

Many men have been touched by the marvelous sight of natural beauty and consequently turned to the Creator to fervently beg his grace and his forgiveness. There are men among the hundreds of millions who do not know the gospel. Those who have a good heart can hope they soon will, but Scripture does not guarantee that this will occur.

Revelation by the conscience

Close to natural revelation is the revelation of God through the conscience. In spite of the corruption which rages among men since the fall into sin, “the work of divine law remains engraved in their hearts and consciences and testifies to it” (Romans 2:15). This is an effect called common grace by which God preserves even the rebellious world from sinking into total perversion. Every human being is sensitive to the ideas of good and evil. He knows that he must cling to one and reject the other.

Perhaps there is not only a trait inherent in human nature, but also a far echo of the revelations accorded to the early patriarchs Enoch (Genesis 5:21-24) or Noah (Genesis 6-9). But this conscience functions very imperfectly. Like all the rest of our personality, it is corrupted by the fall of man. It is far from being, as we sometimes pretend, the voice of God in us. There are people who call good evil and evil good (Isaiah 5:20).

Some people can commit the worst excesses without remorse. Others can be unjustifiably scrupulous over unimportant things and even over an appropriate act when it is not to their liking. Therefore we need something that tells us clearly what is good and what is evil if we don’t want to

lose our way. Men are far from fulfilling the demands of this very imperfect interior law. It may be true that sometimes they can find a reason to defend themselves, but they have abundant and great reasons to accuse themselves and recognize that they are guilty.

It can even happen that men are pushed by their remorse to search for the unmerited grace of the God who forgives. Once again we can wish for it, but there is no scriptural guarantee that this will happen. It would also be vain to search for such a revelation of God in other religions. Elements of the truth may exist in other religions, but they are often so wrapped up in error that it is difficult to dig them out.

One can, like Paul, search for points of contact. It is not only the Athenians who built an altar to the unknown God (Acts 17:23). It is not only the Greek poets who could write valid affirmations here and there as Aratus did.

Note: *"We are his offspring"* (Acts 17:28). The manner in which the Koran speaks of Jesus can, up to a certain point, contribute to the evangelization of Muslims.

It is also true that some pagans behave in a manner that ought to shame Christians. Jeremiah said of his contemporaries, *"Cross over to the coasts of Kittim and look, send to Kedar and observe closely; see if there has ever been anything like this. Has a nation ever changed its gods? (Yet they are not gods at all.) But my people have exchanged their Glory for worthless idols"* (Jer. 2:11). Therefore we can rejoice in the weak lights that shine in the night of paganism, the religion of those who worship several gods or spirits. We must not belittle the virtues that such pagans manifest in their conduct, nor take on a sadistic fervor to find the worm in the fruits they may bear.

But we have no illusions. There are those who have the immense privilege of being lit by the feeble lanterns of other religions. "God has revealed his words to Jacob, his laws and decrees to Israel. He has done this for no other nation. They do not know his laws" (Psalm 147:19-20). "...Their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened" (Romans 1:21). Outside of Christ, the nations are "excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world" (Ephesians 2:12).

At the present time people speak much about a divine activity that touches all men in general. They say that the Church should not present herself to those who do not know Christ, as if she alone knew the truth. The Church ought to dialogue with the world and look for an awareness of God in the speech of our contemporaries. Of course we ought to have an attitude of modesty and not represent ourselves as better than others. We should listen patiently to their honest questions and give them honest answers.

Let us show sympathy for the legitimate preoccupations that are part of our society.

It is also true that the sovereign God directs the affairs of all humanity. Christ said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." The Eternal One can arouse a man like Cyrus without his knowing and call him his shepherd, and even his anointed one (Isaiah 44:28-45:1). Let us rejoice that nothing escapes God's divine providence, and let us learn to accept from his hand the unfolding of history. But let us not forget that the world is still perverted and "lies under the control of the evil one"

(I John 5:19), and that we must not conform ourselves "to the pattern of this world" (Romans 12:2). We must find better things than the wanderings of this world in order to know God in his fullness.

Lesson 2: Special Revelation

(The readings for this lesson are drawn from the book Précis de Doctrine Chrétienne by J.M. Nicole, Éditions de l'Institut Biblique, 6 ème Édition, 2002, chapter 1, "La Révélation".)

Scripture attests that God in his grace has addressed himself directly to men in order to make himself known to them. Among those who heard the voice of God when he communicated his word to them were Adam (Gen. 3:9-11), Cain (Gen. 4:6-15), Noah (Gen. 6:13-21), Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3, Isaac (Gen. 26:24), and Jacob (Gen. 28:13-15). Moses especially received numerous divine revelations in the course of his career. "The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend" (Exodus 33:11). At Sinai all the people could hear the voice of God (Deut. 5:24). Aaron (Numbers 18:1), Joshua (Joshua 1:2-9 etc.), and Gideon (Judges 6:25,26 etc.) are among those whom God addressed in a manner explicit enough that the tenor of their declarations could be written down.

At certain times, "the word of God was rare" (1 Samuel 3:1), but he was not totally mute. From Samuel to Malachi an almost uninterrupted series of prophets noted the history of Israel. Amos went so far as to say, "Surely the Sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7). So the people of God benefited from special and direct revelations that were much more precise than the general revelation which appeared in the conscience, in nature, or secular history.

Notice that God made himself known to the Israelites, not in a single moment but all through the centuries. We are not talking about an exposé of truth that is found outside of time and space. The divine revelation puts itself into the flow of events whenever the occasion presents itself. You can see a certain progression, each new communication bringing light that adds itself to the preceding events. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob worshipped the Lord as the all-powerful one, El-Shaddai, the one who is sufficient in Himself. See Exodus 6:3.

They recognized him less well under his name Yahweh, the Eternal One. God was not totally unknown by that name, however. Abraham knows that it is the Eternal One, the God of heaven, who called him to leave his family and his country (Genesis 24:7). It is in the presence of the Eternal One that Isaac wants to bless his son (Genesis 27:7). Already at the time of Enoch they had begun to call on this name (Genesis 4:26). References could be multiplied. But the remark that is found in Exodus 6:3 leaves no doubt that the patriarchs were not conscious of all that this sacred name of Yahweh signifies as the God of the Covenant. The departure from Egypt and the stay at the foot of Sinai were necessary so that men would have a clearer vision of the Lord and his faithfulness to the covenant of grace. Over the centuries the prophets and the Psalmists received still further precise details of the coming of the Messiah.

The Bible does not explain much about the way God communicates with men. In the case of the young Samuel there was an audible sound, since Samuel thought it was the old priest Eli who called him (1 Samuel 3:4-10). A similar thing seemed to happen at Sinai when God spoke the 10 Commandments (Deuteronomy 5:24). But we must not think that God always spoke in a manner perceptible to the physical ear. A real variety in the mode of communication is shown by the declaration in the book of Numbers 12:6-8. "When a prophet of the Lord is among you, I reveal myself to him in visions, I speak to him in dreams. But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house. With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles."

The Lord is not short of methods. As the author of the book of Hebrews says, “God spoke at many times and in various ways...” (Hebrews 1:1). For the psychologist the question of the manner of revelation is important. But for the believer it is secondary. The essential is the content of the message. Someone whom we love can send a message by letter, by telephone, by telegram, by radio or some other way. It is not indifferent to us, certainly, but what counts for is what he says. In this respect Scripture gives us precise information. It uses the same terms used by the Lord. But it remains quiet about the means used. The whole revelation of the Old Covenant is simply preparatory.

How did God reveal himself to the men of the Old Covenant?

Between Malachi and John the Baptist there were four centuries of silence to emphasize the difference between the prophetic age and the actual arrival of the messianic kingdom. Then the Word of God was once again heard, and that was in the ears of John the Baptist (Luke 3:2). His ministry was the prelude to the total and definitive revelation that was given us in Jesus Christ. In spite of all the divine interventions, the men of the Old Covenant longed for a personal coming of the Lord. “If only I knew where to find him,” exclaimed Job (Job 23:3). David begged, “Part your heavens, Lord, and come down,” (Ps. 144:5) and the prophet Isaiah echoed him, saying, “Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down” Isaiah 64:1). (Rend means to tear apart.)

The believers of those days dared express themselves like that because God had promised to intervene for them. He answered their cry during Christmas night when His Son Jesus was born in Bethlehem. He was truly “God with us” (Matthew 1:23). He fully revealed the name of the Father to men (John 17:6). Those who saw him saw the Father (John 14:9). “No one has seen God.” It is not only unbelievers and mockers who say this. The apostle John said it also, but he adds, “God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known.”ⁱ

Could something have been added to the revelation after Jesus passed on to his disciples everything he had learned from his Father (John 15:15)? Yes. The manifestation of the Son culminated at the cross, where “God demonstrated his own love for us” (Romans 5:8), and at the resurrection by which Jesus “was declared with power to be the Son of God” (Romans 1:4). Before these decisive events took place, the disciples could not grasp their meaning. When the Lord spoke to them about these things, “they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it” (Mark 9:32).

During his last conversations with them the Master told them, “I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth” (John 16:13). After Pentecost, they benefited from the light that the Comforter gave them. God showed Peter that he should not call any man unclean (Acts 10:28) and that he should show a good welcome to unbelievers. Paul did not receive the Gospel by means of man, but rather “by revelation from Jesus Christ” (Galatians 1:12). The last book of the New Testament is called the “Apocalypse”, which means “revelation”. This title was not given it afterwards. It is part of the text itself. (Revelation 1:1)

1. What characterizes the revelation that we benefit from under the New Covenant? (John 14:15-17, 25-26 and 16:13-15)

<u>Biblical Text</u>	<u>People</u>	<u>Manner of revelation</u>
Genesis 3:8-10	<i>Adam and Eve</i>	<i>God spoke aloud directly to them</i>
Exodus 33:11		
Numbers 12:6		
1 Samuel 3:4-20		
1 Kings 3:5		
1 Kings 19:9-18		
2 Peter 1:20-21		

a. How does God reveal himself to men under the New Covenant?

2. Since the completion of the New Testament, should we expect new revelations concerning the plan of salvation? See also Revelation 22:18-19.

The Holy Spirit must have made clear to the early witnesses the full revelation that the Son brought to the world by his incarnation. We have no hope for further light before the return of our Savior. In speaking to us “in these last days” (Hebrews 1:2), God spoke his final word. “But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be let him be eternally condemned!” (Gal. 1:8)

Some have tried to supplement Scripture with visions, inspirations and explanations. In principle at least, they could have done this without contradicting the existing revelation. But inevitably, in a fatalistic manner, they come to contradict the Bible in some way or another.

<u>Biblical text</u>	<u>Person who receives the revelation</u>	<u>Means God used to reveal himself</u>
Luke 1:8-13	Zechariah	An angel of the Lord
John 1:14	Contemporaries of Jesus	The Word made flesh; the Son who came from the Father
John 14:26	The disciples of Jesus	The Holy Spirit
Acts 9:1-6	Saul	The voice of Jesus
1 Cor. 2:10-16	Believers in Jesus	The Spirit
Heb. 1:1-2	Those who live in the last days	The Son
Revelation 1:1	John	An angel of the Lord

Note: In this regard one can cite the Montanists of the 2nd century, the Priscillianists of the 4th century, different Illuminatiⁱⁱ of the Middle Ages, certain exalted persons of the Reformation, and some Quakers of the 17th century. In the present day, there are Mormons, Christian Scientists, Friends of Man, the Seventh Day Adventists, and Jehovah’s Witnesses. The Catholic Church, with some exceptions, is ready to formulate new doctrines by explaining Scripture on the basis of the theory of the evolution of dogmas.

Of course the Holy Spirit can give us warnings and directions for our personal life. There is no biblical text that says that the author of this study must write this present work. However he truly believes he should obey the order from God to do it. But concerning Christian doctrine, the revelation has been closed since the death of the last apostle. As the confession of La Rochelle says:

“We believe that this Holy Scripture perfectly contains the divine will. All that man must believe to be saved is sufficiently taught therein. All manner of service that God requires of us is described at length. Man must not teach other than what the Holy Scriptures have taught us... To start with, we reject wholeheartedly all that is not in agreement with this infallible rule (Article 7).

There is certainly a revelation of Jesus Christ that we still await (1 Corinthians 1:7; 1 Thessalonians 1:7; 1 Peter 1:7, 13; 4:13). This will occur when he returns from heaven. Then we will know as we have been known. Then we shall see face to face (1 Corinthians 13:12). And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. 2 Peter 1:19

3. Since the New Testament has been completed, should we expect further revelations concerning the plan of salvation? Why or why not? (Galatians 1:8; Revelation 22:18-19)

4. Could the Koran be considered to be a faithful revelation ? Why or why not? (Re-read your answer to question 3 and consult 1 John 4:15, 5:10-12 et 1 Cor. 15:3-4)

Lesson 3: The Inspiration of Scripture

*The reading texts for this lesson are drawn from the book *Précis de Doctrine Chrétienne* by J.M. Nicole, Éditions de l'Institut Biblique, 6th edition, 2002, chapter 1, "La Révélation".*

The revelation given by God to a few privileged men was not for them alone. It was to be transmitted to others. This is where the concept of inspiration comes in, as presented in II Timothy 3:16. *"All Scripture is God-breathed."* This is an action of the Holy Spirit acting on the author and guiding him to express exactly what God has revealed to him.

Note: In this chapter the word "inspiration" is used in this sense. There are other meanings besides the physiological sense. It can be applied to a human or divine influence pushing a man towards a certain activity. It can designate an idea that comes suddenly to a person, without speaking of the enthusiasm that raises an artist above himself.

The prophets and apostles were the first people to whom God revealed himself. These then communicated to others what they had received. This double office is highlighted by an expression that occurs frequently in Leviticus. "The Lord called to Moses and spoke to him...." (Lev. 1:1) This is an example of revelation. "Say to the Israelites..." (Lev. 4:1) is an example of inspiration.

Some people could receive a revelation without having the gift of inspiration needed to transmit it. Numerous hearers of Jesus benefited by revelation without having this gift. They left nothing to posterity. Even The apostle Paul, who preached numerous messages and wrote so many inspired biblical works, did not find it possible to tell the contents of the revelation he heard during a vision in the third heaven (1 Corinthians 12:4).

On the other hand, one cannot bring a divine message to his brothers and sisters if he has not received it. However, here there are distinctions to make. Certain prophets received the revelation by an interior voice that came from the Spirit. Others witnessed events outside themselves, but these also constituted a divine manifestation. They were inspired to prepare an account that conformed to God's intentions. Luke compared the documents at hand in order to write his gospel, and John described the apocalyptic visions that came to him. They found themselves in very different conditions concerning the revelation of the text. But concerning the inspiration of the text, these two were kept in the same way from error in their writing.

These sacred authors were conscious of being inspired. Moses presented the commandments to the Israelites as commandments from God (Deuteronomy 10:13). The formulas like "This is what the Lord Almighty says," and "the word of the Lord came to me", recur dozens of times in the prophets. They were certainly used abusively by false prophets, but this did not unsettle the true prophets in their assurance. Micah could say, "But as for me, I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the Lord, to declare to Jacob his transgression, to Israel his sin" (Micah 3:8).

In the New Testament we find the same certitude. The Thessalonians welcomed Paul's teaching, not as a word from man, but as a word from God, and Paul congratulates them on their recognition of this (1 Thessalonians 2:13). He also invited the Corinthians to recognize that what he was writing to them was a command from the Lord (1 Corinthians 14:37).

Luke noted that in his time, several had undertaken to write an account of the life of Jesus. He did not think his book was superfluous, however. To the contrary, he took up his pen with the conviction that what he wrote was absolutely true, and so Theophilus would have a certain (we could say infallible) basis for his faith (Luke 1:1-4). From the first page of the Bible to the last we find the same stress on authority and the same joyous assurance among the biblical authors.ⁱⁱⁱ

In this passage Paul was inspired to tell us what his opinion was, even if the opinion itself was not inspired. The honesty with which the apostle admits that he does not communicate a divine precept guarantees by contrast that he is sure that he communicates God's thoughts.

Not only are the sacred authors conscious of being inspired, but even more, they give witness one to another. The prophets and the psalmists confess that the law of Moses is the law of God. Psalm 103:7 says that God "made known his ways to Moses". The later prophets testify to the earlier ones. For example, note Zechariah 1:4-6. Malachi 4:4 explains, "Remember the law of my servant Moses, the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb for all Israel."

And what should be said about the witness given to the Old Testament by the New. Jesus said to his adversaries, "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions! For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and 'anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death' (Mark 7:9-10). Thus, for Jesus, what Moses had said was the commandment of God.

A word of a Psalm is attributed to the Holy Spirit speaking through the mouth of David. See Acts 4:25. Peter declares, "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" (2 Peter 1:21). This same Peter praises the wisdom of his well-loved brother Paul whose epistles he counts among the other Scriptures (2 Peter 3:16).

In the light of these passages and the tens of others we could cite, we come to the following conclusion. The Bible shows itself without limitation to be the Word of God. And so we have two choices. One, either it is not the Word of God but rather a work of lies, or second, it is a work of God and so we must submit ourselves to it without reservation.

1. What is the relationship between revelation and inspiration?

2. Can the Bible be considered the Word of God? Why? Read the following verses before formulating your answer: Exodus 34:27, Psalm 119:160, Proverbs 30:5, Isaiah 28:16, Micah 3:8, Matthew 15:4-6, 1 Corinthians 14:37, 1 Thessalonians 2:13, 2 Peter 1:20-21, 2 Peter 3:16.

Those who identify the Scriptures as the Word of God have used different expressions to qualify the word “inspiration. Without any reservation it can be described as wholly inspired or “verbally inspired”. Verbal inspiration means that God inspired the authors to choose the particular Hebrew or Greek words that appeared in the original text. Since the ideas are inseparable from the words that express them, this concept seems reasonable. The affirmation of Christ, according to which not one iota or stroke of a letter of the law will pass away, justifies the notion of literal inspiration. Read Matthew 5:18 and Luke 16:17.

The term *theopneustia*, based on the text where Paul proclaims that all Scripture is divinely inspired (in Greek: *theopneustos*, II Timothy 3:16) served as title of a work by L. Gaussen that appeared toward the middle of the 19th century (Louis Gaussen, *Théopneustie*, Paris & Londres 1842). Since then, French speakers have a tendency to designate by this term the concept of inspiration advanced by this theologian, and to call those who share this concept *theopneustia*.^{iv}

The differences in style imply that each biblical author used his own mind. In general, when God used human instruments, he did not do it in a mechanical manner but left them to use their own faculties.

Scripture is fully divine and at the same time fully human. An illustration will perhaps help to understand this. Suppose that I have a half-dozen capable secretaries. I ask each one to compose a letter and tell them the essence of what I want them to write. Each one will produce texts that reflect her tendencies, habits and styles. But when I sign them, I am responsible for the terms they use and even the punctuation, just as if I had written them myself. Thus, each letter is entirely from the secretary and entirely from me. The example is imperfect, for the inspiration of the Bible is more than that. But this shows how even verbal or literal inspiration is compatible with the latitude allowed the author.

3. Was the Bible dictated? How can you reconcile inspiration and the freedom given the sacred authors?

If the Bible is wholly inspired, the result is that the Bible is without error. “God is not a man, that he should lie...” (Numbers 23:19) His “word is truth” (John 17:17). This inerrancy of Scripture poses several problems that we will study later on when we speak of God’s authority.

Let it suffice to recall the parallel between Jesus Christ and the Bible. Christ is at the same time truly God and truly man, yet exempt from sin. The Bible is at the same time the divine word and a human word, yet exempt from error (John 1:1). Some have contested this parallel for fear of violating the unique character of the Son who is the only absolutely perfect person.

Jesus himself shows solidarity with Scripture. He said it could not be abolished (John 10:35). Total respect for Christ leads us to take the same attitude he does. We should regard it without reservation as being the infallible Word of God. Such a notion obliges us to believe that the names of the authors of the sacred biblical texts are correct. Certain works are signed, such as several Psalms, the Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Songs, the books of prophecy, most of the epistles, and the book of Revelation. The Gospel of John presents itself as written by the pen of an eyewitness (John 21:24).

The Pentateuch contains one or two brief allusions to the literary activity of Moses (Ex. 17:14, 24:4, 34:27 and Deut. 31:9). Its Mosaic origin is attested by Jesus himself and in all the rest of the Bible. For example, see John 5:46 and 47.

Many modern critics challenge the assertion that the Pentateuch comes to us from Moses. The various hypotheses they advance on this subject really belong to the domain of an introduction to the Old and New Testaments. It would require a long scholarly dissertation to treat the subject adequately. But even after reading hundreds of pages of such criticism by well-known and unknown writers, we will not necessarily reach their conclusions. To study their arguments is not to be convinced by them. The supporters of such critics may cry out that it is presumptuous to challenge the “unanimous agreement” of such learned people, even though the agreement among them is only relative. In reality it seems even more presumptuous to set aside the affirmations of the prophets, the apostles and our Savior.

4. Read John 1:1, 14-18 and Revelation 19:11-16. What parallel can we establish between Jesus Christ and the Bible?

5. What was the attitude of Christ toward the Scriptures, living as he did in the times of the Old Testament? See Matthew 5:17-19, John 10:34-36, 17:17.

There are theories concerning inspiration that clearly appear inadequate. Some of them deny any supernatural intervention. Our holy book would then be simply a collection of documents by which we could research the men who searched for God. In actuality, it is a document by which we see how God searches for the men who will not search for God.

Other theologians say that certain pages of the Bible are clearly inspired by the Holy Spirit, but that others are not. The Scriptures would then be seen as a mixture. Scripture would be considered as partially inspired, certainly more than other good books, but not essentially different from them.

Such a book would not *be* the word of God. It would only *contain* the Word of God. It would be a rule for faith and life but with possible scientific or historical errors.

It is true that the Bible is not intended to inform us about science or secular history. It can hardly answer questions we ask in these areas. “I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?” said Jesus (John 3:12). If on the earthly level the Bible were not worthy of faith, it would cease to be credible on the spiritual level.

We cannot examine Karl Barth’s doctrine of inspiration in depth, but it is appropriate to speak of it in a few words. Barth holds an authentically evangelical position when he affirms that only the prophets and apostles were in contact with the divine revelation of Christ, and that it is uniquely through them that this revelation can come to us. But his affirmations are insufficient. He makes of Scripture a simple echo of the revelation a very human, given back to this revelation. (K. Barth, *Dogmatique Ecclesiastique*, #16 & 17, vol. 4, p. 7, 71-72) with a margin of error possible. The apostles and the prophets did not say, “God spoke to me and this is what I felt”. They meant to communicate that God spoke to them and this was his message. They did not only testify to the divine word. They handed it down.

The position of R. Bultmann is even more questionable. He distinguishes between the precious central idea, the call to decision contained in the Bible, which is still valid, and the mythical outer appearance due to the mentality of the prescientific age. We must remove the Christian message from this to make it accessible to the modern man. (R. Bultmann, *Kerygma & Mythos*, vol. 1, pp. 15,16, cited by Miegge, *l’Evangile et le Mythe*, Neuchatel & Paris 1958, pp. 16-18)

The gospel, precisely, rejects the myths: “We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty” (2 Peter 1:16).

The Gospel rests on facts that are certainly supernatural, but they are in harmony with the mentality of the 20th century just as much as they are with the first. Then, as now, salvation by the cross was a stumbling block and foolishness (1 Corinthians 1:23), and the bodily resurrection of Christ was an impossibility that made unbelievers sneer (Acts 17:32a).

6. Note some insufficient concepts of inspiration.

For Further Study

7. What do you think of the following expressions : plenary inspiration, verbal inspiration, literal inspiration, *theopneustia*? Which of these expressions are to be preferred over others? Why?

Lesson 4: The authority of Scripture

The reading texts for this lesson are drawn from the Précis De Doctrine Chrétienne, by J.M. Nicole, Éditions de l'Institute Biblique, 6th edition, 2002, chapter 1, "La Révélation".

If the Bible is the Word of God, it goes without saying that it is the authority. It is not dependent on the attitude that men may have in toward it. Whether we recognize it or not, it is the truth. Everything it says merits acceptance and belief, and what it commands must be done. Those who accept this authority are to testify to it and engage others to submit to it. They may not say that they founded it, for it came into existence by itself.

Some submit the Bible to the authority of the Church, since it is the Church that determined which books should be admitted into the canon or excluded from it. A moment of reflection shows that this reasoning does not hold together. The holy writings are not inspired because someone said they were; they were inspired in themselves before anyone put them on the list. The Church, simply recognized that the canon was already established by God. When we find ourselves faced with a text whose author is the Holy Spirit, it is truly impertinent to claim that it is validated only by the stamp of a human authority saying "read and approved". Compare I1 Corinthians 3:14-16.

The testimony of the Church is certainly important. Bibles do not fall from heaven printed with a guarantee on the first page. Every one of us has paid attention to Scripture, having been stimulated to do so by other Christians. It is in this sense that we should understand the famous sentence of Augustine: "He would not have believed the Gospel if the authority of the Church had not pushed him."^v But in recommending this reading, the Church does not place herself above the Bible, but submits herself to the Bible and invites others to do the same.

1. Read Mark 7:1-15. Note that the Pharisees were considered to be the religious authorities at the time of Jesus. According to the principles set out by Jesus here, what should be the rapport between the authority of the Bible and that of the Church?

2. Certain sects and churches claim that a man cannot understand the way of salvation by himself. He must have the interpretation of the Bible. Read John 14:25-26 and John 16:8-13 and respond.

Once in contact with the Word of God, the faithful do not depend any longer on the Church to believe it. The same thing happens to them as happened to the Samaritans. At the beginning they believed in Jesus because of the testimony of the woman, but later after seeing the Master, they

could say to the woman, “We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world” (John 4:39-42).

So that we can be truly certain of hearing the voice of God when reading the Bible, it is necessary, as Calvin said, that the Spirit who spoke from the mouth of the prophets enter into our hearts and bring us to life, to persuade us that the prophets had faithfully put forward what was commanded from above.” (Calvin, *Christian Institutes*, Book 1, chapter 7#4)

“The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him” (1 Corinthians 2:14). Therefore, even though Scripture “in its own majesty has enough to be revered”, nevertheless it begins to really touch us when it is sealed in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.” (Calvin, *Christian Institutes*, Book 1, Chapter 7 #5) It is necessary that the Eternal One open our eyes so that we can contemplate the marvels of his law (Psalm 119:18).

Gerard Pella has rightly observed that the Bible does not need to change. It does not need new meaning. What is needed is a change in us, the readers. We need to become receptive so that the Bible “becomes for us” what it really is, by God’s grace, that is, his Word (Gerard Pella, “*le Theologien Devant Sa Bible*” in *Hokma*, #12, pg 49).

When he works in us this way, we are all taught by God, according to the promise of Jesus (John 6:45). We no longer believe because of a human testimony, no matter how authoritative it is, but we learn, like faithful sheep, to recognize the voice of the Good Shepherd and to distinguish it from that of strangers (John 10:4-5). This interior testimony of the Holy Spirit will not make us fall into a dangerous subjectivism. If a certain page of Scripture leaves us cold, or even shocks us, this in no way proves that it is contestable. It simply proves that we are not yet wholly submitted to God’s workings.

From the instant that we are born again, we recognize the voice of our Master in the sacred text. As we grow in the faith, we are increasingly in harmony with all that we read in the Word. This encourages us to think that others, both living before us and currently with us, have proclaimed the full inspiration of the whole Bible. But it is not this consensus that is the basis for our faith. It is the Lord himself who plants in us an unshakable certainty.

3. According to the following texts, how can we understand the Bible and recognize its authority?

a. Luke 24:45-49

b. 1 Corinthians 2:12-14

c. 1 Corinthians 3:14-18

We can, of course, put forward various arguments in favor of the truth of Scriptures. They conform with archeological discoveries, fulfillment of prophecies, both past and present, and confirm the Christian experience. But all this is secondary. The authority of the Bible comes directly from God. Every authority rests on a higher authority, but sovereign authority, by definition, can only depend on itself. Otherwise it would not be supreme.

Scripture, the Word of God, the, possesses this supreme authority. It follow that neither antiquity, nor customs, nor the multitude, nor human wisdom, nor judgments, nor arrests, nor writings, nor decrees, nor councils, nor visions, nor miracles must should be opposed to these Holy Scriptures, but rather that all things must be examined, regulated, and reformed according to them. (From the Confession of la Rochelle, article 5)

It is especially in the domains of faith and life that the authority of the Bible imposes itself on us. It was given to provoke our faith and direct our life. But in other domains also it must be considered infallible.

When science seems to contradict the Bible, it is rather superfluous to try to harmonize the two. Science is fluctuating. Its observations can be inexact and the theories that explain them are only hypotheses. Those of today have supplanted those of yesterday and risk being supplanted by those of tomorrow. It is useless to establish an agreement that is only provisional.

In addition, the Bible is absolutely true, but our comprehension of it is imperfect. Let's not run the risk of imitating the inquisitors who, in a faulty interpretation of the biblical texts, condemned Galileo because he said that the earth was not stationary.

It would also be possible to contest the Scripture in the name of conscience. As we have seen above, man's conscience functions more or less badly since the fall. It would be insane to wish to be wiser or more virtuous than the Lord. We have only to submit ourselves to his law, starting with the principle that all men can be liars, but God remains true (Romans 3:4).

4. Read the following passages: Job 21:22, Psalm 119:160, John 17:17, and I Timothy 6:20-21. What do you think of the idea that the Bible could contain historical or scientific errors?

5. Is it necessary to try to reconcile the scientific theories with the affirmations of Scripture?

FOR FURTHER STUDY

6. If the Holy Spirit opens our eyes and makes us know the truth concerning Jesus, explain why God has also planned for human teachers.

a. Ephesians 4:11-13

b. 2 Peter 3:15-16

7. However, remember that human teachers, contrary to the Scriptures, are not infallible. They can commit errors when they teach. Read Acts 17:11 and 1 Thessalonians 5:20, 21 and describe the solution. It is necessary to verify everything we teach by comparing each teaching with the Scriptures.

Lesson 5: The Interpretation of Scripture

*The texts to be read for the original French version of this lesson are drawn from the book *Precis de Doctrine Chrétienne* de J. M. Nicole, Éditions de l'Institut Biblique, 6ème édition, chapitre 1 « La révélation ». In English, one may propose . . .*

It is good to recognize that the Scriptures are true, but that is not enough. We need to understand them. At this point we come to the science called *hermeneutics*. Hermeneutics brings together the general principles that guide our interpretation of the Biblical texts. It is different from *exegesis*, which is the explanation of a passage. We can say that hermeneutics is the theory which underlies the practice of exegesis, rather as homiletics is the theory of preaching.

Many teachers agree that exegesis involves three tasks.

1. Explain the terms used
2. Try to understand what the author meant
3. Establish how we should respond to the text (This process is called “application”.)

The best work requires a scholar’s knowledge of the language and literature of the Bible, including mastery of the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts, together with a good understanding of the historical context. But the work of exegesis cannot be entirely avoided, for the simple reason that all reading involves a certain measure of interpretation and exegesis. We have a number of trustworthy translations into English, translations which complement and correct each other. With patient work, with the help of the Holy Spirit, and with hearts ready to obey, a satisfactory level of understanding can be reached.

When you compare several translations it is best to avoid the practice of adding together the various meanings proposed. Look instead for the central ideas, the points which most of the translations have in common.

Translations are necessarily imperfect, so it is natural to ask whether we have the right to use them. The answer is clearly yes. Christianity does not have a sacred language. The Old Testament of the Bible is in Hebrew, with the exception of about a dozen chapters in Aramaic (Daniel chapters 2 to 7 and Ezra chapters 4 to 7). The New Testament is in Greek. As if God wanted to emphasize that any language can carry His message, on the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit enabled the believers to speak in the languages of people who came to Jerusalem from all over the world (Acts 2:4). The book of Revelation pictures believers as a great multitude that no one could count, from “every nation, tribe, people and language” (7:9).

When the inspired writers of the New Testament wanted to quote the Old Testament, they did not always provide their own translation from the original Hebrew text. Often they made use of the Septuagint, a widely accepted (though very imperfect) Greek translation that was completed and circulated well before their time. They did not recognize in the Septuagint the full authority of the original text of the Old Testament.^{vi} (In the Greek Church it is sometimes believed to be authoritative.) But their use of the Septuagint demonstrates that they approved the principle of translating the Bible. Even imperfect translations can transmit God’s message effectively.

1. What use is it to have different translations of the Bible? What is the role of the Holy Spirit in all this?

2. How do Acts 2:4-8 and Revelation 7:9 show that God did not intend to set one single language apart as sacred?

The study of the principles of interpretation of the Bible is called hermeneutics. Here there are fundamental problems. We should bear in mind that people without the Spirit of God (sometimes called “natural” or “unspiritual”) react against the word of God. They reject the message of the Gospel as foolishness (1 Corinthians 2:14). The Spirit must tear down their false patterns of thought before they can obey Christ. See 2 Corinthians 10:5. Without the Spirit’s work, people do not want to listen. Note Isaiah 28:12 and Jeremiah 7:25-26. Their condition may even reach the point where God hardens those who have been covering their ears. He may bring them to a condition of such spiritual stupor that they are like someone who is blind. Given a book to read, he simply cannot do it. See Isaiah 29:10-11.

Jesus himself ran up against the incomprehension of his listeners. Before them was a perfect revelation, but because of their ill will, they were as the prophet Isaiah had said. “Though seeing, they do not see. Though hearing, they do not hear or understand.”

“In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah:
 ‘You will be ever hearing but never understanding;
 You will be ever seeing but never perceiving.’ ”
 (Matthew 13:14-15, referring to Isaiah 6:9)

This resistance was one reason Jesus spoke to the people in parables. Was He trying to pierce the shell of their indifference, or to press them more firmly into it? However that may be, the result was that the armor of their indifference kept them from the divine message.

In any case, it can safely be affirmed that if communication is not established, the fault lies on the human side. Even believers are not entirely free of resistance to God’s message. Remember how the twelve disciples could not grasp the unpleasant truth that Jesus had to die. Recall the resistance to Paul’s teaching that is reflected in his letters. How often have we believers failed to grasp and appropriate some truth because of our own resistances to the will of God! This may happen unconsciously. In this connection, consider John 16:13 in relation to Ephesians 4:30. See also 1 Corinthians 3:1-3, Galatians 2:14 and 3:1, Ephesians 1:17-18, 5:15-17, and Hebrews 4:11-12. The Word of God does contain things that are hard to understand, even for committed believers. Note that even Peter admits that he finds it difficult to understand some things in the letters of Paul. This

should give us a little comfort when it's hard to for us to grasp the sense of a passage. At least we are in good company.

Certain people have claimed that because language is symbolic, the biblical text is incapable of transmitting a definite message. They are mistaken. For one thing, they don't take their own theory very seriously, for they publish books in the hope that their ideas will be received in a way that is more than merely symbolic. More importantly, if God has chosen to use human language to communicate with us, we may be sure that He made His message intelligible. He Himself has said, "I have not spoken in secret, from somewhere in a land of darkness; I have not said to Jacob's descendants, 'Seek me in vain' " (Isaiah 45:19). "...Even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing" (2 Corinthians 4:3). For those who are born of the Spirit, the Scripture is luminous. When we meet problems in understanding the Bible, the reason is simply that we have not yet been made perfect.

3. It is important to try and understand the historical and cultural context of each passage. Read Leviticus 25:25. What was the "right of redemption" (Ruth 4:8)?

a. Who had the right to exercise it?

b. What was the meaning of removing one's sandal and giving it to another party? (Ruth 4:7)?

4. Read Ruth 4:9-10 and note the effects of the ritual of redemption performed by Boaz on behalf of Mahlon, Ruth, and Boaz himself.

5. Read Ruth 4:13-15 and note how the action of Boaz affects Naomi, the mother-in-law of Ruth.

6. Next, it is important to try to understand the importance of the text in the context 1) of the entire book itself and then 2) in the historical period in Redemptive History. Read Ruth 4:17 and note down the significance of this event in the history of the Old Testament.

7. Finally, it is important to understand the significance of the text in the context of the whole Bible. Since Jesus said that all Scriptures speak of Himself, we must understand how each passage is linked to His story. Read Matthew 1:1,5-6 and explain the importance of this passage in this wider context.

This is not the place to review the hermeneutical methods that have been favored by different theologians over the centuries. The peoples of the world come from various religious traditions, each of which favors one or more approaches to their holy book. Some offer a specific interpretive grid. Among Christian traditions we may mention Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, Baptist, Dispensationalist, Charismatic, and so on.

There is a danger that we will allow our traditions and theological preconceptions to dictate what we find in the Bible. It is hard to put off a familiar and useful pair of glasses that may somewhat distort what we see in the Bible, and it is especially hard when we have forgotten that we wear them!

We need God's help to be open and honest enough to change our positions when necessary, and not cling to interpretations we have learned within our own traditions if those interpretations are not well supported by the most relevant texts of the Bible. We need to seek a balance in which we are neither so easily influenced that we follow each new theological fashion, nor so rigid that we refuse to give full and fair consideration to the objections that are raised against a position we hold.

Here is one simple rule will to help us toward sound interpretation. **Let scripture interpret scripture.**

In Matthew 4:6-7 the Devil wanted to incite Jesus to throw himself down from the highest point of the Temple. The Devil quoted a verse of Scripture: " 'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.' " But Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.' " (See question 8 below for other references.)

Christ here demonstrates an important hermeneutical principle: **An interpretation of a biblical text should be rejected if it is contradicted by another clear biblical text.**

Almost all heresies build their doctrine by starting with one or more Biblical declarations that they expound with prejudice against other declarations that actually provide a sound and balanced orientation. Scripture is an organic whole. Ideally, when we interpret a passage, we would have all the other relevant texts in mind, so as to avoid losing our way and wandering among the trails of personal opinions.

We may occasionally find before us two or more texts that seem impossible to reconcile. What should we do? Usually it is best to suspend judgment until we can learn more and get a better perspective. If we try to bend the texts to make them fit, we risk committing ourselves to an inept interpretation which distorts the message of each passage in its own context. Never compromise truth to gain the mere appearance of harmony.

8. Read Matthew 4:5-7, Psalm 91:9-16, Deuteronomy 6:16, and Exodus 17:1-7. Why did Jesus refuse to follow the application of Psalm 91:11-12 proposed by Satan?

We should also remember that the divine message is intended to lead us to Christ. We will develop this point in a later chapter, but we need to state the principle now. Speaking of the Old Testament, Jesus said, "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life." (John 5:39-40)

We could hardly imagine that someone who stands gazing at a magnificent sculpture by Michelangelo would be so insensible as to see nothing more than a block of marble of certain dimensions and weight. Sad to say, many who read the Bible are so far blinded that they read and even study the details of the sacred text, all the while missing the principal message. They forget that these letters from God do not make us wise unto salvation apart from faith in Jesus Christ. (2 Timothy 3:15)

And that is just what gives the Bible its immense importance, because it is only the Bible that gives us the message directly from God. The doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture is a fortress with solid and seamless walls, behind which we have a secure refuge. The Word of God is living and active; it must "spread rapidly", literally "run", to use the vivid expression of the Apostle Paul. (2 Thessalonians 3:1).

A good doctrine of inspiration serves above all to clear the field of action so that no obstacle will block the advance of the Word. It must profoundly penetrate our thought in a way that frees us to proclaim it with full assurance, without second thoughts, uncertainty or ambivalence. The First Letter of John was written so that we may be in fellowship with the Father and with the Son (1:3). The same thing is true of the entire Bible.

9. Read John 5:39-40, 17:17, and 20:30-31; Colossians 1:28; 2 Timothy 3:14-17, and 1 John 1:4. What is God's main purpose in giving us the Holy Scriptures?

FOR FURTHER STUDY (See above, 7)

10. An interpretation should be rejected if it contradicts a clearer biblical text, or if it contradicts a number of texts that are in mutual agreement.

a. What do these two texts teach regarding eternal life?

i. Romans 2:6-7

ii. Romans 3:20

b. Which of these two texts is supported in the following references? John 14:6, Romans 3:11-12, 3:27-28; Galatians 2:15-16; 3:10-11; Ephesians 2:8-9?

c. How then can we interpret Romans 2:6-7?

On rare occasions we may find two texts that we are not able to reconcile. When this happens, it is better to wait until more information is available, rather than to attempt to harmonize the texts by twisting the meaning of one of them.

11. Sometimes genuine believers have different points of view on secondary matters. Read Romans 14:1-8, then summarize Paul's instructions concerning such situations.

Lesson 6: Formation of the Biblical Canon

Introduction

The expression “the biblical canon” refers to the list of books recognized as being part of the holy Scriptures inspired by God and therefore worthy of confidence. We frequently hear questions such as, “Who chose the books of the Bible?” “When were they chosen?” “How did they know how to choose the books God wanted in the Bible? Now we will tackle these questions.

First we will cite some helpful remarks from the book by Geisler and Nix, *General Introduction to the Bible* (1968). “A book does not become the Word of God simply because it is accepted by God’s people. On the contrary, a book is accepted by God’s people because it was already the Word of God. That is to say, it is God who gives to the book his divine authority, and not the people of God. They simply recognize the authority that God has already accorded to his Word.” (Page 221)

God spoke to the prophets and the apostles who then wrote down what God had expressed to them by his Holy Spirit. It was not difficult for the believers to distinguish between what was given by God and what had come from the human spirit. As Josh McDowell says in his book *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict* (1999): “The Church did not determine the canon; she discovered it. The Church is not the mother of the canon. The Church is the daughter of the canon. She is not the judge of the canon, but rather its witness. She is not the master of the canon, but rather its servant” (pg. 21).

The following principles directed the choice of the books destined to be included in the canon.

- That which was written by a true prophet of God is the Word of God. God himself supported his prophets by giving them miraculous signs in order to confirm his word and to make a clear distinction between the true prophets and the false ones.
- The message of a true prophet can contradict neither the previously revealed word of God nor the character of God Himself.
- One must have felt and experienced the power of God in the reading of the text.
- The text must have circulated and been accepted by all the communities of believers. If not, one might have doubted the source of these writings. The rule was always: “If the believers have serious doubts about a text, it is surely not the Word of God.” It was never a question of choosing among several texts, all of which were candidates for the canon. Rather, they included in the canon those of which there was no doubt.

1. What does the expression, “biblical canon” mean?

The Old Testament

In the O.T. the book of Chronicles (which the Jews treat as one document in two parts) was the last to be recognized as the authentic Word of God. It was written before the year 400 BC. After this, no other book was accepted by the Jews as coming from the mouth of God, in spite of the fact that there were several later historic and religious writings. It would seem that the Jews had never had serious doubts on the subject of their canon. In the year 90 A.D. the rabbis discussed at Jamnia the

inspiration of the books of Esther, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs and Ezekiel. However, they changed nothing after this counsel and the canon remained identical to that of today.

The Old Testament was the Bible of the Lord Jesus. He showed full confidence in this book as having been inspired by God. He cited it often to support his teachings. We find about 120 passages of the O.T. quoted in the gospels. In Luke 24:44 Jesus alluded to three parts of the O.T. that were recognized by the Jews as being authentic. These are the law, the prophets and the writings (Jesus called this third section “the Psalms” because this book is the first and the longest of the third part).

Jesus rejected the oral traditions of the Pharisees (Matt. 15:1-14, Mark 7:1-16), but he was never at variance with them over the canon approved by all the Jews. On the contrary, when he discussed these things with the Pharisees, he spoke of the complete canon as witness against them. He said, “Therefore this generation will be held responsible for the blood of all the prophets that has been shed since the beginning of the world...since the beginning of the world, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah...” (Luke 11:50-51). Abel’s martyrdom is mentioned in the first book of the Jewish canon (Genesis) and the martyrdom of Zechariah in the last (Chronicles). Thus Jesus affirmed the inspiration of the books of the Jewish canon.

All the Protestant and evangelical Bibles have the same books in the O.T. as the Jewish canon. Only the order of the books is different. On the other hand, the Catholic Bibles have added some books called “The Apocrypha” to the O.T. We will look at these additions later.

2. Read Luke 24:25-27. What attitude does Jesus hold concerning the O.T. during his teaching of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus?

3. Read Luke 24:44-49.

a. How did Jesus describe the three parts of the Old Testament? (v.44)

b. What does this passage teach us about the attitude of Jesus toward the O.T.?

4. Read John 10:34-36 and note in v.35 what Jesus said about the O.T.

The New Testament

All the books and letters of the N.T. were written either by the apostles themselves or under their supervision. The question of the exact dates of these compositions is complex, and will not discuss this here. It would seem that the oldest of the N.T. books, whether the Gospel of Matthew or of Mark, would have been written around the year 50 AD. A small bit of the Gospel of Matthew dating from this era has been found. It is probable that Paul wrote his letters to the Galatians and the Thessalonians at this time also. The latest writing could be the third epistle of John and could date from the early 50s also. The last writing could be the third letter of John or the Apocalypse, written toward the year 90. In any case, the 27 books of the N.T. were written before the end of the first century.

5. Fill out the following table. It describes the relation between each book of the NT and an apostle.

Books of the NT	Verses	Author and Relationship with an apostle
Matthew	Mt. 9:9	
Mark	Acts 12:25; 2 Tim. 4:11	
Luke and Acts	Col. 4:14; 2 Tim.4:11	
John, 1 st , 2 nd , & 3 rd John, Revelation	John 21:20-25; Rev.1:1	
Epistles to the Romans; 1 st & 2 nd Cor., Gal., Eph., Phil., Col., 1 st & 2 nd Thes., 1 st , 2 nd Timothy, Titus, & Philemon	Rom. 1:1; 1 Cor. 15:8-9	
Epistle to the Hebrews		
James	Mt. 13:55 Gal.1:18-19	
1,2 Peter	1 Peter 1:1	
Jude	Jude 1; Mt 13:55	

The establishment of the canon

Several circumstances led Christians to settle on the canon of books they accepted as being divinely inspired.

First there was the problem of heresies that appeared in certain churches. Marcion, a heretical Christian who established his own church in 144 AD, taught that the God of the O.T. was the god of creation and strict justice, and that he is not the same as the God of the N.T. who is love. Thus he rejected not only the O.T., but also the books and verses of the N.T. which closely resembled the books of the O.T. It was therefore vital for the believers to respond to this position by specifying the list of truly inspired books.

In addition, there were furious persecutions against the Christians. The edict of Diocletian in 303 AD demanded the destruction of all the Christian writings under pain of death and pushed the believers to establish the definitive canon of the New Testament. They were ready to die in order to preserve the books truly inspired by God, but no one wanted to give his life for a doubtful book.

Finally, the rapid expansion of the Church around the Mediterranean Sea made it urgent to diffuse Christian writings and their translation into foreign languages. But first it was necessary to define which books were the truly God-given.

Already at the beginning of the 2nd century, we see the beginning of the process of defining the canon. Ignatius (50-115 AD) drew the distinction between his commandments and those of Peter and Paul "because they were apostles". Toward 180 AD, in his tract "Against Heresies", Irenaeus affirmed that 20 of the 27 books of the N.T. were part of the canon. After this, the more or less complete lists appeared in the writings of the Church fathers.

In 367 AD Athanasia made the oldest mention of the final list. He named the books one by one. Since in 367 AD the council of Hippo in 393, no one has disputed the contents of the canon of the N.T. After this, all Christians of all denominations agreed that these writings must be kept as part of the Word of God.

6. What circumstances pushed Christians to establish the list of the canonical books?

7. After what date was the canon definitely fixed?

The divine origin of the NT

Many passages in the NT attest to its divine origin. We will mention several here, and you can search for others (see “Going Further”).

8. Explain how each of the following texts confirms the divine origin of the Scripture.

a. John 14:26

b. Gal. 1:11-12

c. Eph. 3:3-5

d. 2 Peter 3:15-16

The Apocryphal Books

Introduction

The original sense of the Greek word “apocryphal”, comes from the Greek word, “hidden”, but it is also used to describe the religious books that were not accepted into the canon (especially those of the OT). Because of the importance accorded by certain people to these books, it is convenient here to answer some questions. Are these books truly inspired by God? Do they merit being included in the Bible alongside the 39 books of the OT that we already recognize as being the Word of God? What shall we say about the Apocrypha? And what shall we say about the books in the NT called “apocryphal”? What value do they have?

Old Testament

The Apocrypha of the OT is a collection of books (called “deuterocanonical” by the Catholics) written between 200 BC and 200 AD. These books were not received into the canon for four essential reasons.

- They contain many geographical and historical errors.
- Some of their teachings contradict doctrine in the Bible.
- Their literary style is artificial and is nothing like the rest of the Bible.
- They lack spiritual power and divine imprint.

The best known of the apocryphal books are Tobias, Judith, the Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, and First and Second Maccabees.

Among the stories of these books, we find an angel who lied, a woman who cut off the head of a king, the pardon of sin obtained by a gift of alms, the instructions to make a speech after a meal, and the history of the battle between the Jews and the Selucids.

Even the Catholic Church did not accept these books as being inspired until in 1546 when the bishops, in reaction against the progress and expansion of the Protestant church, affirmed their agreement at the Council of Trent. At the same time, they spread several other false doctrines. For example, they taught that salvation was not by grace alone, but that people had to go to the Church to obtain it.

Neither Jesus nor the authors of the NT nor the secular Jewish authors cite apocryphal texts to back up their teaching. On the other hand, they continued to cite the books of the OT. The rabbis who met in Jamnia in 90 AD to discuss the canon of the Scriptures did not retain the apocryphal texts as inspired.

Even if some Christians of the first centuries read the Apocrypha, some early Church fathers, such as Origen, Cyril of Jerusalem and Athanasia, spoke openly against these books. At first Jerome, the famous translator of the Bible into Latin, refused to translate the Apocrypha, saying that “these books serve as an example for life and instruction of morals...but point toward the establishment of doctrine.”

Later, the Protestant reformers like Martin Luther did not accept the apocryphal books, and there were a good number of learned Catholics who agreed with him on this point. We must conclude that these books do not make up a part of the canon.

9. Who accepted the apocryphal books of the OT and when?

New Testament

The situation of the N.T. concerning the apocryphal books is simpler than that of the OT. It is true that there were a number of books, besides the 27 that we have in our NT, that were considered by certain people as being inspired. They were generally rejected in 393 during the council of Hippo.

The best known of these books were the Epistle of Barnabas, the Shepherd of Hermes, the Teaching of the Twelve, the Apocalypse of Peter, and the Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians. In the case of these books, we note certain things.

- None of these books were ever accepted universally. They were only recognized by certain groups of believers who were geographically isolated.
- None of these books were treated in the same way as the 27 books of the NT. They were sometimes placed at the end of a collection or mentioned in the table of contents.

- No church council included them among the canonical books.
- The limited popularity they had is explained mainly by the fact that they had certain names of people and stories of events in common with the canonical books. Judged according to their own merits, they were not worthy of a place in the canon.

10. Explain the importance of Titus 1:13-14 in the light of the discussion of the apocryphal books of the Old and New Testaments.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

11. Search for more passages that affirm the divine origin of the NT. Share them with other members of the group.

12. Notice I Timothy 5:18, where Paul cites side by side a verse of the OT (Deuteronomy 25:4) and a word of the Lord Jesus found in Matt. 10:10 and Luke 10:7. What does this show us about the attitude of Paul toward the words of Jesus?

Lesson 7: The Fidelity of the Biblical Texts (1)

The Validity of the Ancient Manuscripts

Introduction

The specialists have elaborated several criteria to establish that an ancient manuscript has faithfully conserved the text written by its original author and, more generally, if the material is worthy of confidence. There are three types of proofs.

Bibliographic proofs: This is the examination of all the manuscripts that have been discovered from the beginning until our day. Do they correspond with each other? Can we establish the original text with certainty?

Internal proof: Did the author actually see the events he recounts? Has he consulted other witnesses? Are there contradictions in his account? What kinds of sources does he mention?

External proof: Are the facts confirmed by other writings of the time? Are they confirmed by archeological or scientific discoveries? Are the geographic details correct?

In the following lessons each of these proofs in the Old and New Testaments will be examined closely. Questions will be asked. Are the biblical manuscripts we have acquired worthy of our confidence? Do they faithfully conserve the original text? Is it possible that they have been changed or falsified?

The proof of the manuscripts

The Bible of today is the fruit of at least 1500 years of inspiration by the Holy Spirit of God. It dates from the time of the writing of the Pentateuch by Moses, around 1400 BC, to the end of the first century after Jesus Christ when the last books of the OT were composed. The texts that resulted were faithfully copied and recopied by hand by believers across more than 3000 years, from the time of Moses until the invention of the printing press in the 15th century.

In addition, it is very probable that our most ancient ancestors, such as Adam and Noah, had left written accounts that Moses used later to write the beginnings of the Pentateuch. We read in Genesis 5:1, "Here is the book of the posterity of Adam".

Even if many people of the Middle East have left stone monuments and thousands of documents written on clay tablets, it seems that the authors of biblical texts had always used parchments of vellum (animal skins prepared especially for writing), or leaves of papyrus (strips of the plant of papyrus stuck together by pressure).

Ancient peoples joined these sheets of parchment or papyrus in order to make rolls no longer than 10 meters. The pens were made of stalks of reeds. Their ink was made from a mix of carbon with glue and water. As you can see, they were made of fragile materials.

They constantly needed new copies, not only because of the demand, but also because the only copies were deteriorating. That's why the oldest manuscripts of the OT date from the second century BC, while the first complete copies of the NT date from the 4th Century AD.

1. What materials were used in the composition of the Bible over the centuries?

2. How can we explain the absence of original biblical manuscripts?

The ancient manuscripts of the OT

Until 1890 the specialists of the OT had at their disposition only a reduced number of manuscripts in Hebrew, the original language of these writings. None of these manuscripts came to light before 895 AD. The only manuscript of this period containing the entire text of the OT was the Codex of Leningrad, dating from 1008 AD. All these manuscripts were preserved by the meticulous work of the Masoretic scribes.

This small number of manuscripts was considered late in comparison with the original documents. This is explained mainly by three factors.

- The passage of time had a destructive effect on parchment and papyrus.
- The Jewish scribes had copied the texts of the OT with such care that the copy was considered better than the original because it could be read more easily and was on a newer surface. (To find more information on this topic, consult *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*. It exists also in Arabic and Spanish.)
- The respect of the Jews for their Holy Scriptures was so great that they took the old torn or worn out copies and buried them as if they were dead. These copies therefore disappeared.

In 1890, 200,000 manuscripts there were discovered hidden between the walls of the synagogue of Ben Ezra in Cairo, Egypt. Among them were several fragments of the Old Testament from the 5th century AD.

In spite of this, the relative lack of manuscripts in the original language gave place, especially in the 20th century, to accusations of the unreliability of the biblical texts. However the sensational finds of Qumran were uncovered and changed this situation. In 1948 the Bedouins near the Dead Sea discovered some caves in which were clay jars containing manuscripts of the OT dating from the second century BC to the first century AD. Right away specialists began to compare these “great grandfather” documents with their descendants of 1000 years later.

The results were astonishing. Even if there were sometimes divergent readings between the manuscripts, (which is quite normal), these differences were unimportant. Thus the specialists could confirm the reliability of the OT texts that we use today.

Take for example, chapter 53 of Isaiah. This prophecy was given about 600 years before Jesus Christ. The Dead Sea scroll that contains chapter 53 dates from about the year 125 before Christ. In that passage there is only a single word (“light” in verse 11) that does not appear in the manuscripts

of the Masoretic scribes, even after they were copied and recopied by hand for more than 1000 years.

3. Explain the importance of the comparison between the Dead Sea manuscripts and the biblical manuscripts dated a thousand years later.

4. When someone tells you that the text of the OT was corrupted and that the Koran dating from the 7th century after Christ contains the most correct version of the events and people of the OT, how can you answer?

The ancient manuscripts of the NT

In the case of the NT we find ourselves before an abundance of bibliographic proofs. Scholars have already identified more than 5500 Greek manuscripts of the NT. Some of these are complete and others are only fragments, dating from 50 to 1400 years after Christ. The NT is therefore by far the most attested work dating from antiquity. Besides the NT, the book with the most surviving manuscripts is *The Iliad* of Homer. He wrote his poem around 800 BC. Today 643 manuscripts are attributed to him. There are about 2000 years between the date of composition and that of the most ancient manuscript.

The NT was written between 50 and 100 AD. About 25,000 ancient manuscripts have been found, written in Greek, Latin, Copt, Ethiopian, Arabic, Syriac, and other languages. The length of time between the composition of the last parts of the original text (Revelation, and the letters of John, written around 90 to 100 AD) and the existence of a complete copy is only 225 years. Other ancient books, such as the histories Herodotus, Thucydides, and Tacitus, exist in fewer than 20 ancient copies, with a separation of more than 1000 years between the date of composition of the original and that of existing copies. It is therefore clear that if someone wanted to cast doubt on the textual authenticity of the NT, he would be obliged to reject all the ancient books also. None of the manuscripts that have survived could be considered as having faithfully conserved the original text of the author.

5. Why can we affirm that the NT is the most thoroughly attested book of all antiquity?

Let us look briefly at a review of the most important NT manuscripts that were discovered up to this time. The oldest, a fragment of the Gospel of Matthew, was found rather recently. The authorities place it around the year 50 AD, extremely near to the original composition.

A portion of the gospels date from the year 125. After this comes the fragment of Ryland of the Gospel of John that dates from about the year 130, about 40 years after the composition of the original manuscript. Then there were a few manuscripts dating around the year 200 that covered a large part of the NT. The first complete copy of the NT, which was called the Codex Vaticanus, dates from approximately 325 AD. There would have been many more manuscripts had not the Roman authorities imposed brutal persecutions on the Christians. During these persecutions Bibles were burned and many Christians died because they wanted to keep them.

6. Describe the three oldest fragments of the NT and give their dates.

7. What is the date of the first complete copy of the NT? What is it called?

The creation of chapters and verses

Sometimes people ask, “Was it the authors of the original manuscripts who divided the text into chapters and verses?” There were certain divisions of the OT going back to the period before 586 BC, and certain others of the NT dating from the end of the 3rd century AD. However the divisions we know today were added to the biblical text during the 16th century. Stephen Langton had already marked whole Bible into chapters in 1227 AD, but it was Robert Stephanus, a Parisian printer, who fixed the divisions into verses in the Latin Vulgate in 1555.

The different readings

Obviously there was an original manuscript of each book or letter of the Bible, or several manuscripts if the author had dictated his work to a group of scribes. It is after this that copies were made. As mentioned earlier, these original manuscripts have long since disappeared since the Bible is an extremely ancient book.

If all the copies were always saying the same thing, this disappearance would be of no importance. But when we compare the copies one with another, we sometimes find little differences between the texts. This problem did not result in a desire to change the text, but rather from the fact that the transcribers made small errors in the copies that they made. Perhaps one person dictated the text, and a group of scribes wrote what they heard, but a few of them made mistakes in several words. Possibly a transcriber wrote what he had just read, but in looking at the text, he skipped a word or one or more lines, or he perhaps his eyes shifted to a previous line because he saw there the same word that he had just written.

The great majority of these errors are not important because they do not in any way change the sense of the text. These errors are easily recognized. Even in the few cases when the original reading is not clear, these different readings do not change the general sense of the text. Sometimes this occurs in the OT also, but less often since there are not so many copies written in the original language.

8. What importance should we attach to the fact that there were sometimes different readings among the ancient manuscripts of the biblical text?

Look at an example of two different readings. In the whole chapter of Matthew 3, we find only one significant difference among the ancient manuscripts. Read carefully the two versions of verse 16.

The New International Version (version 9) reads, “As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him.”

The Holman Christian Standard Version (2003) reads, “After Jesus was baptized, He went up immediately from the water. The heavens suddenly opened for Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming down on Him.”

Notice that the Holman translation includes the words “for him” (the underlining has been added). The words “for him” are expressed by one word in the Greek text. The Greek word may have been added for clarification, or omitted because it seemed unnecessary while copying the manuscript. Or more likely, it was simply added or omitted unconsciously, by mistake. Then those who used this manuscript to make other copies transmitted this same error. Some of the ancient manuscripts and translations do not have the word, so some modern translations do not translate it. Other translations include it, translating it as “to him” or “for him.” We know that the original text contained one of these two possibilities, but it is impossible today to know which of the two is accurate. In such cases certain Bible editions include the variant expression in brackets. The HCSB does not use brackets but provides a footnote: ‘Other mss omit *for him*.’ (Compare with other translations.)

9. How important is this variant in Matt 3:16...

a. For understanding the passage itself?

b. For the teaching (doctrine) of the Bible?

What about the Koran?

The Muslim Koran has not escaped problems of textual transmission. Mohammed pronounced the last passages of the book in the year 632 AD, but according to learned Muslims, the text of its canon was not established until the third caliph, Uthman (644-656). He edited an official text about 20 years after the original messages. Following this, he commanded that all the many texts, with their variant readings, be destroyed. Even if this version of the facts is accepted, the oldest manuscript of the Koran dates from around 772 AD, some 140 years after the death of Mohammed. In addition, the destruction of other texts by Uthman did not bring about a single standard text of the Koran that has lasted until this time. A few variant readings still exist.

To further explore this subject, we recommend the book, *The Koran and the Bible: In the light of history and science*, written by Dr. William Campbell, available in English, French and Arabic.

10. Compare the difficulties faced by the disciples of Jesus and of Mohamed to establish a reliable text of their respective master-teacher. How did each group decide to approach the problem?

11. A friend contends that the existence of variant manuscripts proves that the Bible has been changed. How would you respond to him/her?

FOR FURTHER STUDY**A. The complete history of the transmission of the texts of the OT**

Before the discovery of the manuscripts in Cairo in 1890 and at Qumran in 1948, the specialists of the OT only possessed a few manuscripts of the OT in Hebrew. The oldest of these was the Codex of Cairo (895 AD) that contained the books of the prophets. Other copies of this period are the Codex of Petersburg (916), the Codex of Aleppo (925), the codex number 4445 in the British Museum (950), the Sassoon manuscripts dated 507 and 1053 (tenth century) and the Codex of Reuchlin of the Prophets dated 1105.

As mentioned previously, the only manuscript of this period containing the entire text of the OT is the Codex of Leningrad of the year 1008. Between the year 1100 and the beginning of printed texts of the OT in 1450, there are more than 3000 medieval manuscripts, but these have less importance because the origins to the texts can be traced. However, notice that even without the sensational discoveries of the Dead Sea, the text of the OT was already well confirmed by the different translations in Aramaean (the Targums), Greek and Latin.

The Targums

After their captivity in Babylon (586 BC), the Jews began to lose the use of Hebrew and to speak Aramaean and other languages. Because of this, they were obligated to make translations and sometimes a paraphrase in order to read them publicly in the synagogue. For example, see Nehemiah 8:8.

The oldest copies of these translations in Aramaean are called "Targums". They date from around 500 BC, but the translation was made much earlier than that. The Targum of Onkelos was written in the 2nd century BC. Among the manuscripts found at Qumran was a copy of the Targum of Job dated from before 70 AD.

The Septuagint

This version is a translation of the OT into Greek. It was made in Egypt after 250 BC with the goal of helping those Jews who did not speak Hebrew. It became very important, not only for the Jews, but also for the Christians of the early centuries, since Greek was the common language of the Middle East at that time.

When the authors of the NT cite the OT, they usually use the Septuagint. Sometimes, because of the translation into Greek, the form of the verses cited in the NT is slightly different from what is found in the OT (translated into French or Arabic directly from the original Hebrew). The oldest manuscript fragments of this translation are the papyrus 458 of John Ryland (2nd century BC) and the papyrus "Fouad 266" from around the year 100 BC. There are no complete or nearly complete manuscripts in which the Septuagint is found with the NT until the 4th century after Christ. (See more about this below.) The oldest of these manuscripts is the Codex Vaticanus.

The Vulgate

As for the Latin translation, one version existed from the 2nd century AD, but it was a translation of the Septuagint. In 382 the pope Damasus 1 asked Jerome to make a revision of this text. He revised the Psalms first, then he translated the whole OT directly from the Hebrew, finishing his work in

405. This translation of the OT, with his Latin translation of the NT, was adopted as the official Bible of the Catholic Church during the Council of Trent in 1546. It is known as the “Vulgate”.

The Samaritan Pentateuch is composed of the five books of Moses, preserved since the return of the Jews to Palestine after the exile in Babylonia. The text is written in Hebrew with the ancient paleo-hebraic letters. The oldest manuscript dates from the 11th century after Christ. The specialists in biblical studies use it with the ancient versions as a witness to its antiquity and faithfulness to the original Hebrew text.

1. Make a list of the most ancient manuscripts of the OT and their dates.

B. Complete history of the handing down of the manuscripts of the NT

We have seen that in the case of the NT we find ourselves with extraordinary bibliographic riches. We have already identified more than 5500 Greek manuscripts of the NT. Some are complete and others are fragmentary.

In addition to the three oldest manuscripts already mentioned in this lesson, there are several manuscripts dating around the year 200 AD, such as the papyri 32, 46, 64, 66, 72, 75, and 76, that cover a large part of the NT. The other partial dated copies between these papyri and the first complete copy of the NT, the Codex Vaticanus, 325 AD, are too numerous to be mentioned here.

We also mention the Codex Sinaiticus, 350 AD, and the Codex Alexandrinus of the year 400 AD. A codex is a collection of manuscripts, the ancestor of the modern book. All three of these codices are copies of the whole (or nearly whole) Bible. As we have said, it is certain that there would have been many more manuscripts if the Roman authorities had not brutally persecuted the Christians. During these persecutions, Bibles were burned and many Christians died because they tried to save their Bibles.

Notice also that, in any case, the Christian authors of the 2nd and 3rd centuries managed to preserve almost all of the NT in their teachings, commentaries, tracts, sermons and histories. In fact, the fathers of the early Church so frequently cited the NT that even without any manuscript at all we could have reconstructed it with nothing but their writings.

Toward the end of the 20th century, David Dalrymple gave himself to a meticulous study. He wrote, "Since I possessed all the books of the Church Fathers of the 2nd and 3rd centuries, I searched them and found quotes that cover the whole NT, with the exception of 11 verses."

Among other authors let us note Clement of Rome (around 95), Hermas (95-150), Irene (born in 130), Ignatius (170-235), Polycarp (70-156), Clement of Alexandria (150-212), Tertullian (160-220), Hippolyte (170-235), Justin Martyr (133), Origen (185-253), and Cyprian (died in 258).

1. Complete the list of the oldest manuscripts of the NT (that you have begun above in this lesson) and give their dates.

Lesson 8: The Fidelity of the Biblical Texts (2)

The Unity of the Written Word

Introduction

Once the specialists had established that the text they had before them faithfully represented what its author or authors had written, they could pass on to the examination of the second type of proofs, that is, internal proofs.

Of course it is always necessary to demonstrate that the text is worthy of confidence. Did its authors write true stories? Were they eyewitnesses of the events they described? What types of research did they do? What sources did they use? Are their accounts coherent and without contradictions?

In fact, the Bible is full of indications that its authors wrote either what they had seen and experienced or what they received from witnesses of the events. It is equally clear that they consulted written sources, especially when they were writing the history. Let's consider first the aspect of visual testimony.

Visual testimony

Frequently the authors of the Bible wrote in the first person. David did this in the Psalms. The prophets Ezekiel (1:1) and Daniel (8:1) used the first person in their works, as did John, Paul and Peter in their letters and John again in Revelation.

Especially when the authors of the NT speak of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus that they insist they had been visual witnesses or, as in the case of Luke, had undertaken serious searches to establish the truth.

The apostle Paul was so sure of the death and the resurrection of Jesus that, during his defense before the Roman governor Festus and the king Agrippa, he did not hesitate to ask the king to confirm everything he was saying "because it was not done in a corner" (Acts 26:26). In 1 Corinthians, Paul gives a list of those who saw the risen Lord Jesus. On one occasion there were about 500 eyewitnesses. Most of them were still living when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians. If someone had wanted to discover the truth, he could easily have gotten the information himself.

1. Link these biblical texts with the visual witnesses they mention.

John 19:35	The apostle John and others with him
Acts 2:14 and 22	The apostle Peter and others with him
2 Peter 1:16	The apostle John alone
1 John 1:1-3	Those of Israel who listened to the apostle Peter
1 Corinthians 15:3-6	500 persons

2. What is the importance of this large number of eyewitness reports compared with the testimony that could be given to the authenticity of the Koran?

The importance of the written word

When an author writes a book of history, it is probable that he will consult earlier documents. A serious author will not hesitate to mention them, and this is what the biblical authors have done. Even concerning the beginnings of the human race, it is very possible that Moses referred to books he had received from his ancestors. We read in Genesis 5:1, "This is the book of the posterity of Adam". The Hebrew "sefer" seems to indicate that Moses reproduced this genealogy from a written document.

When God gave Moses the covenant commandments, he said to him, "Write down these words" (Ex. 34:27). In John 5:46 and 7:19 the Lord Jesus confirmed that Moses was the author. This does not mean that there were never any inspired additions to the text. For example, it was necessary that someone else tell about Moses' death in Deuteronomy 34. Also, the original text of the Old Testament had no vowels to facilitate the reading of this text aloud. It is evident that the copiers had clarified the text by adding vowels and several place names.

The authors of the OT books of history refer several times to the accounts collected in other history books, such as the book of "Jashar" (Joshua 10:13 and 1 Samuel 1:18), the book of the "Acts of Solomon" (1 Kings 11:41), the book of the "Acts of the Kings of Israel" (1 Kings 14:19), and the book of the "Acts of the kings of Judah" (1 Kings 14:29). These last two are older than the two books of Chronicles found in the Bible. There is the book of "The Law of Moses", which is probably the book of Deuteronomy (1 Kings 14:6), the books of the prophets Samuel, Nathan and Gad (1 Chronicles 29:29) and another book of "Chronicles" (Nehemiah 12:23).

Job, in his distress, expressed his desire to write his words in a book (Job 19:23). Many other prophets received a similar commandment: Isaiah (30:8), Jeremiah (30:2), Daniel (12:4), and the apostle John (Revelation 1:11). All this shows the importance of the written documents for the biblical authors. They wished to preserve carefully what God had communicated. At the same time, they used what others of a similar spirit had written.

3. Read Luke 1:1-4. What methods did Luke use to guarantee the truth of his narrative?

The "contradictions" in the Bible

The enemies of the Word of God claim that it is "full of contradictions", and they pick out some verses here and there to prove it. However, it must be emphasized that the Bible contains no

contradiction that can actually be proven. It is simply necessary to make a serious and honest investigation of the verses or statements in question.

Take two examples of apparent contradictions that are sometimes cited: the Apostle Peter's denial of Jesus and the suicide of Judas.

4. Read the following texts:

Mark 14:30 " 'I tell you the truth,' Jesus answered. 'Today – yes, tonight – before the rooster crows twice you yourself will disown me three times.'"

Matthew 26:34 "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "This very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times."

a. How can the difference between these two quotations of Jesus be explained without proposing a contradiction?

b. Read Matthew 27:3-8 and Acts 1:16-19. These two passages recount the death of Judas, who killed himself. Consider the similarities and differences between the two. Can you imagine a situation that can explain the apparent contradictions?

Lastly, notice that if in the tribunals two witnesses reported exactly the same version of the facts, this may indicate that they consulted together and agreed to lie. But if each gave slightly different details that were not contradictory, and were in agreement about the facts, their testimonies would be much more acceptable. It is just the case for the four gospels. In having four separate points of view, they affirm with great force the essential facts, their testimonies are very convincing. It is just the case in the four gospels. In having four separate points of view, they affirm with great force the essential facts. Instead of weakening their testimony about Jesus, this reinforces its truthfulness.

As for the accusation of contradictions, Dr. Gleason Archer, a scholar who knew 35 languages, had won several university diplomas and spent all his professional life in the study and teaching of the Bible. He said in the introduction to his book, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, "As I analyzed the apparent differences one by one and studied the difficulties that some people believed to be in the biblical text. I compared them to proofs from linguistics, archeology, and science, my confidence in the Scriptures was always verified and reinforced."

The unity of the biblical themes

About 40 authors from three different continents wrote the Bible over the course of at least 1500 years. Nonetheless there is an impressive unity of subjects and themes. In Genesis 3:1-19 we read

that man fell into sin and that the earth was cursed because of his sin. Millions of years later God put his plan of salvation into action by sending His Son Jesus Christ to earth. Revelation 22:3-4 tells us that the curse was finally lifted.

The theme of covenants (or testaments) is a thread that can be followed through the whole Bible. God established them with men at various times up until the coming of Jesus Christ and the establishment of the New Covenant. They are examined more closely below. Such a unity would be impossible if the Bible had been only a human production. But behind the human authors the divine author, God himself, who inspired men to write as his Holy Spirit directed.

The theme of “Covenant”

5. In the following table fill in the covenant given in the biblical reference.

Text	Description of God’s covenant or God’s relationship with the covenant
Gen. 9:8-17	<i>God made a covenant with Noah when He promised to never again destroy the earth by a flood. The rainbow was the sign of this covenant and is still to this day.</i>
Gen. 17:1-8	
Ex. 19:1-8 (& 20:1-17, etc.)	
2 Sam. 7:8-16	
Isaiah 42:1, 6-7	
Jeremiah 31:31-34	
Ezekiel 37:21,26	
Mal. 3:1-2	
Luke 22:20	
Heb. 9:15	

Lesson 9: The Fidelity of the Biblical Texts (3) : External Proofs Found in Archeology and Science

The third type of proof one can apply to an ancient document is that of the external proofs. Is the author's work confirmed by other writings of the time? Are the facts in agreement with the archeological discoveries? Are there geographic errors that could throw doubt on the credibility of the author?

Testimonies of non-Christian writers about the principal facts of the NT

Some secular authors of the 1st and 2nd centuries also wrote about the events of the NT.

- Tacitus, Roman historian of the 1st century affirmed that Christ died by the command of Pontius Pilate.
- Suetonius, mentioned in Acts 18:2, was secretary of the emperor Hadrian (117-138) and confirmed that the Jews had been expelled from Rome.
- Josephus (37-100 AD), Jewish historian and high official under the Romans, noted the following events.
 - The death of John the Baptist, killed by Herod (Mark 6:14-29)
 - The death of Jesus, crucified by Pilate (Mark 15)
 - The fact that the disciples of Jesus said he was raised from the dead
 - The martyrdom of James, brother of Jesus (Mark 6:1-3)
- Around the year 112 AD Pliny the Younger, a Roman administrator, described the celebration of the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:42 and 46) and the adoration the Christians gave to Christ as God (Phil. 5:2-8). The Jewish Talmud (70-200 AD) attested to the death of Jesus on the cross.
- Lucian of Samosata, a Greek writer of the second century, opposed to Christianity, criticized the Christians because they worshiped Jesus and practiced his teachings.

These testimonies are entirely sufficient to confirm the principle facts of the NT.

1. What is the importance of these testimonies?

Archeology and the Old Testament

We cannot make a detailed study of all the archeological discoveries that confirm the truth of the biblical text. This would fill dozens of books. We will choose two of the most importance ones.

- There is an account, dating from the 1st or 2nd century AD, of a universal deluge. It was found on some clay tablets left by the Sumerians and the Akkadians. It is comparable to the one given in Genesis 6-9. Still more astonishing, the anthropologists have catalogued more than 215 indigenous versions of the same event, found among peoples as diverse as Greeks,

Chinese, Hindus, American Indians, and Hawaiians. In spite of many differences in details, the existence of all these stories confirms the reality of the catastrophe.

- In Genesis 11:1 we read the story of the tower of Babel. Today there are pyramids in Iraq that date from that time, one of which is surely the tower in question. In the Sumerian literature we find the story of Ur-Nammu, king of Babel between 2044 and 2007 BC. This king wanted to build a ziggurat (a flat-topped pyramid composed of successive levels) for a goddess of the moon, but the other gods confounded the people's language. The people subsequently separated themselves into language groups. According to linguistic analyses, there exist about 40 families of human languages, each completely different from the others. For example, Arabic, French and Chinese have no points of similarity among them at the level of their grammars and original vocabularies.

In Exodus and Deuteronomy there are descriptions of a covenant God made with his people Israel. This agreement is of a particular historical type that had been used at the time of Moses. It was called a suzerain-vassal covenant and was made between a ruler who had little power and owed complete allegiance to a greater king. It is different from the covenants that were used before and after this time. It is apparent from this that the Bible places historical events in their appropriate historical context.

2. In the following exercise look up each biblical reference and complete the table.

Joshua 1:1-5 2 Kings 9:6 2 Kings 17:6 2 Kings 19:20, 35-36 2 Kings 25:22 Jer. 36:4

Archeological discoveries linked to the OT	Texts
Official correspondence found at Tel El Amarna, dates from the time of the conquest of Canaan (14 th century BC). It tells of the time the king of Egypt received the complaints about the invasion of the "habiru" (possibly referring to the Hebrews).	
The black obelisk (841 BC) of Salmanasar III, king of Assyria, carries an image of a man prostrate before him, and the text explains that this is the Israelite king, Jehu, on whom he imposes a tribute.	
In his annals, Sargon the 2 nd , king of Assyria (722-705 BC), claims to have taken in plunder 27,290 men and their chariots as well as the rest of the Israelite population. He deported them all to Assyria.	
Instead of admitting his defeat outside the walls of Jerusalem, the archives of Sennacherib, the king of Assyria (705-681 BC), said simply this about the king: "I shut him up like a bird in a cage."	
The "bulla", the small lump of dried clay used to seal up documents written on papyrus, was found of the seal of Gedaliah, who was named governor of Jerusalem by the Babylonian conquerors in 587 BC.	
The official seal of Baruch, son of Neriah, secretary of Jeremiah	

The covenant God made with the people of Israel, described in Exodus and Deuteronomy, corresponds perfectly to the covenant of sovereignty practiced during the centuries before and after this time. Thus we see that the events recounted in the Bible are always situated in an appropriate historic context.

Archeology and the New Testament

Sir William Ramsey (1851-1939), the famous British archeologist, believed in his youth that the stories of the Bible were only late inventions with little historical foundation. However, after having made serious studies in the book of Acts, he ended by being completely convinced that “Luke is a historian of the first order,” and that “his findings are faithful”.

In fact, archeological discoveries have shown, often in small details, that Luke had written a history that was both exact and of high quality, both in his gospel and in Acts. There are dozens of proofs of this. We cite some of them.

- The existence of governors mentioned in Luke 2:1-2 and 3:1 was confirmed by the texts of secular inscriptions.
- The archeologists have found all the cities that Luke mentions in Acts. In the Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics, Geisler notes that “Luke mentions, without error, 32 countries, 54 cities and 9 islands.”
- Formerly the exact title used by Luke for the politarchai at Thessalonica was in doubt (Acts 17:8. Later 19 inscriptions of the epoch were found that justified this usage, even though no other historian of antiquity used this term.

Several crosses and two ossuaries (recipients for bones of a dead person) were found near Jerusalem. They date from about 50 A.D. and carry inscriptions of prayers that mention the name of Jesus. This demonstrates the presence of Christians in the area a little after the death and resurrection of Jesus. A third ossuary, found recently at the shop of a collector of antiquities, raised intense debates because it carries the inscription, “James, son of Joseph and brother of Jesus”. The date of the ossuary and the inscription seem to indicate that it could well be the one which was used to contain the bones of a blood brother of Jesus (Matt. 13:55). If this were the case, it would be one more convincing material proof of the reality that these biblical persons existed.

The archeologists were able to study the remains of a man crucified around 70 A.D. The position of the nails and the other indications of the manner of his death coincide with the description of the crucifixion of Jesus in the gospels.

3. In the following exercise, find all the biblical references needed to complete the table. An example is furnished for you.

Matt. 27:11-13 Acts 21:27-28 Acts 28:7 Romans 16:23

Archeological discoveries linked to the NT	Texts
A cut stone dating from the 1 st century A.D. carrying an inscription in Latin: “Tiberium...Pontius Pilate...Prefect of Judah”	Matt.27:11-13
Two inscriptions beside the temple at Jerusalem menacing the pain of death for any stranger who would dare to enter	
An inscription describing Publius as the chief official of Malta	
An inscription in Corinth mentioning Erastus	

Science and the Bible

It is often said, and rightly so, that the Bible is not a book of science, but instead, a book of history. However, if the Bible contains scientific or historical errors, one could hardly say that it was entirely inspired by God. It would be nothing more than a human production with, perhaps, a divine influence. It is important, therefore, to underline that while the purpose of the Bible is spiritual, and it uses many literary and rhetorical techniques to which we are not accustomed. But there is no real contradiction that has been demonstrated between the Bible and the facts established by science, or between the Bible and history.

Genesis and evolution

According to Genesis 1 and 2 it is God himself who created life. Until now the scientists have never succeeded in creating life from nonliving matter. Their observation is always that life is transmitted from the living to the living. In addition, it is considered statistically impossible that life could have had its origin by chance. Each living being depends on the formation of proteins that are composed of amino acids. For the theory of evolution to be true, it would have been necessary for the very first protein to be formed entirely by chance.

Because of the complexity of even the most simple proteins, it has been calculated that there exists one chance in 10^{67} that the first protein was formed in this way. Written in full, that number would be the number one followed by 67 zeros. It would look like this.

[illegible]

Bear in mind that in the science of statistics, “impossibility” is defined as any probability less than one chance in 10^{50} . Charles Darwin himself recognized that the discovery of a biological system that could not be produced by a series of small evolutionary changes would prove his theory false. A simple example of such a system is an ordinary mousetrap composed of nine pieces, each having a specific size. If we remove one of these pieces, no matter which one, the trap becomes useless. It is of an “irreducible complexity”. The famous biochemist Michel Behe identified several biological systems of this type, such as the functioning of vibrating eyelashes, the eye, the coagulation of blood, and the transport of proteins to the lysosomes. In this way he demonstrated that the theory of evolution is false.

For more information, see the following references:

- The article “Response to Evolution” in the section ‘Additional Resources’ of the CD.
- Evolution: A Theory in Crisis Michel Denton, Flammarion, 1992
- Le Darwinism en Question: Science ou Metaphysique? Philip Johnson, Editions Exergue 1996

4. If an atheist tells you that God does not exist and that evolution explains everything, how can you answer him?

Language, simple, natural and poetic

It is important to recognize that the biblical authors, like the majority of human beings, normally speak from the point of view of the observer and do not speak in a scientific language. And so we read expressions like “from sunrise”, even if it would have been more exact to say, “from the moment when the earth finishes a complete revolution in space and when the light of the sun has become visible to the eye once again.” Several detractors of the Bible have affirmed that it teaches that the earth is flat since the Bible speaks of the “four corners of the earth”. But this is simply a poetic expression.

Critics would have done better to look at the following texts:

- “He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth.” Isaiah 40:22
- Wisdom personified says, “I was there when he set the heavens in place, when he marked out the horizon on the face of the deep....” Proverbs 8:27
- “He marks out the horizon on the face of the waters for a boundary between light and darkness.” Job 26:10
- “He spreads out the northern skies over empty space; he suspends the earth over nothing.”

We could also cite other cases where the declarations of the Bible coincide perfectly with scientific discoveries. But before we stop, let us remember that scientific discoveries always need to be interpreted. When an atheist or naturalist interprets statements like these, he is likely to think that they are in opposition to the Bible. On the other hand, when they are interpreted with a biblical vision, we find that they confirm the Scriptures in a remarkable way. Let’s not forget that science changes its outlook and conclusions from one generation to the next, but he who puts his confidence in the eternal word of God will never be led astray.

5. As we have mentioned, modern scientific language differs from the language used by the authors of the Bible. Read Mark 4:30-32. Since the time of Jesus, researchers have discovered grains smaller than the meshes of a sieve. How can we understand the word of Jesus here?

Conclusion

From the beginning of this course we have tried to present convincing proofs that help to show that the Bible is actually the Word of God. These proofs are important because they push the unbeliever to think and reinforce our faith. But do not imagine that they are able in themselves to change someone’s heart. From the divine side, the work of the Holy Spirit is needed, and from the human side, a step of faith is needed. As the author of the letter to the Hebrews says: “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him” (Hebrews 11:6). Certainly God in his grace offers us many proofs of his existence and of the truth of his Word, but it is up to us to respond to Him and put our entire confidence in him.

6. Read John 20:24-29 and respond to the following questions.

- a. What type of additional proofs of Jesus' resurrection did Thomas want?
- b. Did Jesus give him what he asked for?
- c. Were these proofs necessary to enable Thomas to believe?
- d. For whom did Jesus promise an even greater blessing?

FOR FURTHER STUDY

As we have seen above, there are many archeological discoveries that are in harmony with the OT. For those who would like to explore this further, we mention the following examples. Concerning the time of the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob) some scholars doubted the existence of certain cities mentioned in the OT, or that certain proper nouns were not used at that time. Later on, these cities and names were found on the clay tablets of Ebla and Mari that dated from the time of Abraham (about 2200 BC). Many of the customs described in the Bible were believed to be unlikely by certain specialists at that time, but they also were confirmed. According to secular documents the price of a slave varied over the centuries. When we compare the price given in the Bible with those mentioned in other documents of the time, we find they correspond perfectly. Obviously it is impossible for an author to know the price of a slave 500 years earlier. The fact that the biblical authors always gave the correct amounts demonstrates that they were contemporaries with the events they wrote about.

- Certain scholars doubted the existence of the Hittites mentioned in several passages of the OT (e.g. Exodus 3:8). Later it was found that the Hittites had a vast empire at the time of Moses.
- Several evangelical scholars date the exodus in 1400 B.C. A little later, the Egyptian king Akhenaton began to believe in one god (the sun god). Perhaps he was influenced by the events of the exodus.
- Archeological excavations at Jericho revealed that the walls of the city had fallen exactly as described in the Bible (Joshua 6:20).
- In Judges 20:14-16 we read that there were “700 chosen men” who threw stones in the battle at Gibeah. The diggings made at this place brought to light a large quantity of stones of throwing size.

- The story of the battle of David against the Jebusites speaks of a water shaft he used to attack them (2 Samuel 5:8). This canal was found in the 20th century.
- Some skeptical historians have said that the dynasty of David was only an invention of the biblical authors and without historical basis. But archeologists have found an inscription that dates a little after this period. It reads, “bet dawid”, which means “the house [or dynasty] of David.”
- Several battles were fought at Lachish (example cf. Jeremiah 34:7). They were largely confirmed during the 20th century by diggings at this place. They found broken pieces of pottery which mentioned the siege, the names of several biblical persons, and a “prophet of God”, who could well have been Jeremiah himself. These were eventually numbered pieces 3 and 16.

In spite of the fact that archeological finds are not necessarily definitive, there is no doubt that the Bible is reinforced by them.

You can review this course by preparing brief responses (no more than 5-6 lines) to the following questions. The final exam will be based on these questions.

Lesson 1 What are the three types of revelation available to men? Give a short definition of each one (no more than 5-6 lines). What are the limits of general revelation (that which is accessible to all men)?

Lesson 2 To whom did God give his Word and how did he give it? Cite at least five examples. Who is the perfect revelation of God at the center of the Scriptures?

Lesson 3 Define the concept of inspiration in the biblical sense. Demonstrate how the Bible declares itself to be the Word of God.

Lesson 4 What should be the connection between the Bible, the believer, and the Church? How does the Holy Spirit help the believer to understand the Bible?

Lesson 5 Explain the term “exegete”. What are the three tasks of the one who exegetes? Identify several rules of a good exegete.

Lesson 6 Why have the original manuscripts of the Bible not survived until our day? Summarize briefly the process of the establishment of the NT canon.

Lesson 7 Scholars speak sometimes of errors or contradictions in the ancient manuscripts of the Bible. Are these expressions correct?

Lesson 8 Give a few internal proofs of the truth of the Bible. How should we respond to the accusations that there are contradictions in the Bible?

Lesson 9 Site three historical texts and three archeological discoveries that confirm the truth of the biblical text. What should the relationship be between the Bible and science?

Endnotes

ⁱ John 1:18. This text poses a problem. The apostle John could not ignore the numerous divine appearances related in the Old Testament. The best solution seems to be the following. The God who manifested himself as the angel of the LORD was at the same time the LORD himself (Judges 6:11-22). The Word, the second person of the Trinity, corresponds well to this situation. Therefore, already under the Old Covenant, from before the incarnation, it was the Son of God who revealed himself. No one could or can see the Father any other way than in His Son, Jesus Christ.

ⁱⁱ *Illuminati*: Groups or individuals claiming special religious enlightenment

ⁱⁱⁱ Only the text of 1 Corinthians 7:25 appears to be an exception. Paul says that he has no order from the Lord concerning virgins, but that he gives his opinion as a man whom the Lord has made faithful. It has pleased God to include in the Bible a number of sayings attributed people who are not inspired. Some come even from those who are inspired by evil. Note the words of the devil. We need these words for our instruction. The biblical authors were urged by God to give them to us, even if those who spoke them were not inspired to express them.

^{iv} Matthew 5:18. Some reject the term “literal inspiration” because the theologians of the 17th century who adopted it believed in the inspiration of the vowel points as well as the consonants of the text. The problem is that the vowel points were added later after the text was written. This objection, however, is not an adequate reason to reject the term “literal inspiration”.

^v Augustine, “Contre l’Épître de Manichée” which is called “Du Fondement,” v. 6. On this subject, see the judicious explanations of Calvin, *Christian Institutes*, Book I, chapter 7 #3.

^{vi} When a citation follows the Septuagint, we find that in the vast majority of cases the point that the New Testament writer wants to emphasize is also in the Hebrew text. There are three or four exceptions, and it may be supposed that in these cases the Septuagint has preserved an authentic reading and that the Hebrew was not copied perfectly, or that the Septuagint has given us the right interpretation of a text which is somewhat veiled in the original language.

By way of example, consider the way the letter to the Hebrews quotes Psalm 8:4-5. The Hebrew text is translated in the NIV, “What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings [or: *than God*] and crowned him with glory and honor.” Following the Septuagint, Hebrews 2:6-7 reads, “What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the angels; you crowned him with glory and honor....”

Two possibilities present themselves. One, the text may have been accidentally changed from *mimalakim* (angels) to *meelohim* (God or gods). It seems more likely that the word *elohim* does not refer to God who is the LORD, but to powerful beings such as angels. The word *elohim* does occur with such a meaning, although rarely. In the context of Psalm 82:1-6 it seems to refer to human beings who are in positions of great authority.