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# God's Truth!

A scientist shows why it makes  
sense to believe the Bible

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I should have failed to produce this book.

A. H.

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## PART ONE

Facts are awkward things

*I**Why Bother?*

The next time you scratch your finger and raise a tiny drop of blood, don't just wipe it off and forget about it. Pause for a moment and reflect. That red blob the size of a pin head is one of the wonders of the world.

Floating around in it like a shoal of microscopic jellyfish are some five million red cells. Every one of them is a distinct living creature. It is born, it lives and works for about four months, and then grows old and dies.

Scattered thinly among the red cells are about ten thousand white cells. There are five different types of these, and their average life span is only a few days. Then there are another quarter of a million floating specks called platelets, and hundreds of different chemicals in solution, all mixed up in an apparently hopeless confusion-and all contained in a spot no bigger than a pin's head.

Yet in the midst of this seeming chaos there is order and purpose. The blood surging ceaselessly round your body provides a better transport system than all the world's postal services put together. Those red cells are like miniature gas cylinders. They collect oxygen from your lungs and deliver it to practically all your cells - and there are far more cells in your body than there are people on earth.

Almost every one of the vast array of chemicals in your bloodstream is on its way to one of a myriad destinations. Some of the sugar and glucose derived from your last meal is heading for your muscles, there to be consumed as fuel. If you ate too much of that chocolate cake, the excess sugar is being sent to your liver, to be stored until your muscles need it.

Other kinds of food products are needed for body-building; they are speeding in all directions to the organs that will make use of them. Iodine is destined for the thyroid, phosphorus for the teeth, calcium for the bones, amino acids for the tissues.

Carbon dioxide is travelling to the lungs to be breathed out. Urea and other waste products are making for the kidneys to be excreted. Millions of red blood cells die every minute, but although their work is finished they are not expelled from the body. They contain an element - iron - that the body does not acquire very easily. It is too precious to be thrown away. So most of these cells are consigned to one of the body's chemical factories to be broken up. There the molecules of iron are carefully preserved, to be used again in the manufacture of new red cells.

A wide variety of hormones travels along the red river carrying messages. Created in one part of the body, they instruct some other part of the body how to behave. A youth's voice breaks, for

instance, and his beard begins to grow, when the hormones from his sex glands tell his throat and his face that it is time for him to sound and to look like a man.

Other components of the blood are there just to keep us from harm. It carries its own puncture repair kit. Its watery base, the plasma, contains a protein called fibrinogen. Aided by the suspended platelets this forms a leak-plugging clot whenever it comes into contact with the air. Without fibrinogen we should bleed to death from a cut finger.

The most common type of white blood cell provides a mobile defence force. When infection strikes one part of the body, millions of these white warriors converge on the scene and slaughter the invading bacteria. Other defenders, the antibodies, have a more limited role. Each antibody spells death to only one kind of deadly organism. Fortunately for us the blood contains many different kinds of antibody, so that between them they protect us from a multitude of diseases.

### **Facts Worth Finding Out**

Just a tiny bloodstain on a handkerchief. Something so commonplace that you would not normally give it a second glance. Yet when you examine it more closely, it has a fascinating tale to tell.

The Bible is rather like that. It is so well known that everybody takes it for granted. Yet very few people *really* know what it is like inside. One purpose of this book is to open up the Bible, and show how interesting it is to those who look beneath its surface.

But there is an even better reason for looking into the Bible. Unlike ordinary books the Bible makes an astonishing claim. "Read me, believe me, and do what I say," says the Bible, in effect, "and the Creator of this wonderful universe will give you a priceless reward."

In these days of slick salesmen and confidence tricksters, this seems altogether too good to be true. Many people take the easy way out. They dismiss the Bible's claims out of hand, without giving them a second thought.

Others behave more thoughtfully. Perhaps they are motivated by a sense of fair play, and do not wish to condemn anything without first giving it a hearing. Perhaps they are moved by that powerful urge, the spirit of curiosity which lies behind all research and discovery. Whatever the reason, they are prepared to examine a few facts about the Bible. This book is for people like them.

Discovering facts and weighing their implications is always a worthwhile job. But it is not always an easy one. Facts can be such awkward things at times.

For example, if the postman comes one morning with an electricity bill for thirty pounds and a statement from the bank indicating that you have a credit balance of eleven pounds and fourpence, you naturally feel rather uncomfortable. Here are some unpleasant facts demanding to be faced. What's to be done about it?

People react differently in a situation like that. Some people would push the two letters out of sight, go off to work, and forget all about it. They seem to think that if they ignore the problem it will go away.

Others might get hot under the collar about it. Who's to blame, they wonder. Did that stupid man from the Electricity Board read the meter wrongly? Have the boys secretly been keeping the electric fire in their bedroom burning all night? Or has that computer system at the bank slipped up?

You can only feel sorry for people like that. Their prejudiced outlook sticks out like a television aerial on a minicar. That's the funny thing about prejudice. The other fellow's prejudices are always so obvious, but it is often very hard indeed to see our own.

### **The Layout of this Book**

That is why this book has been divided into two main parts. There is probably more prejudice about the Bible than about any other subject on earth. So many fantastic untruths have been told about the Bible that it is practically impossible for a newcomer to approach it with an unbiased mind. The Nazi propaganda minister, Dr. Goebbels, knew a thing or two when he declared, "The bigger the lie, the more readily people will swallow it," If enough mud is thrown, some of it is bound to stick.

Consequently, the average man starts off with the assumption that the Bible cannot possibly be true. This puts the writer of a book like this in a fix. What should he do? Start on the defensive, and show how weak are the arguments used to attack the Bible? Or plunge straight in with the positive evidence that the Bible is true?

In making my decision, I have been guided by the advice of a nineteenth-century enthusiast. "Defend the Bible?" he asked indignantly. "I'd as soon try to defend a lion! All the Bible needs is a fair chance, and it is well able to defend itself."

So I decided to make Part One of this book a statement of some remarkable facts about the Bible. To me there is only one possible explanation of these facts: that the Bible is just what it claims to be, a true and infallible message from God to mankind. But then I am biased in favour of the Bible, and you, perhaps, are biased against it.

I am not going to ask you to read Part One with an open mind. We all start with convictions of one sort or another, so that there can be no such thing as a truly open mind. As you read Part One, you are likely to find yourself thinking, "Yes, this all sounds very plausible on its own-but what about all the damning evidence *against* the Bible?"

To this perfectly reasonable question there is a simple answer: that is where Part Two comes in. Part Two attempts to deal with all the most popular objections to the Bible, and you may be surprised to see how unfair and how trivial most of them are.

If you are one of those people who can't stand the suspense of reading a "whodunnit" from beginning to end, but have to have a peep at the ending before you get halfway through, you may be tempted to read Part Two first. But this is not a good idea. You would do better to read Part One keeping all your problems in reserve; then read Part Two, to see how many of those problems can be disposed of; and then go back to Part One again, to reconsider the positive evidence with an easier mind.

And what of Part Three? That is for people whose minds are half made up. If, when you have read Parts One and Two, you think there might be something in the Bible after all, Part Three will tell you how you can settle the matter once and for all.

### **Not Just for Eggheads**

This book is written for ordinary men and women. After all, it was to such folk that Jesus Christ preached. “The common people heard Him gladly,” said Mark, with evident satisfaction.<sup>1</sup> Jesus Himself took pleasure in the fact that “to the poor the gospel is preached”.<sup>2</sup>

For this reason I shall stick to simple English and try to avoid what might be called “scholarly language”. The only places where language of that kind will occur will be in passages quoted from other authors.

In the parts of this book that deal with scientific matters, the kind of language used will probably make my fellow scientists weep. The fact is, you simply cannot talk accurately about science without using the correct, long, scientific terms. But then, as the foreword to an excellent non-technical book<sup>3</sup> published by a British Government scientific laboratory says, “it is more important to be nearly right and understandable, than academically accurate and incomprehensible.”

In any case, I am not writing this book from the point of view of a scientist, but as a student of the Bible. Being a scientist might help you to spot the mistakes of other scientists when they condemn the Bible.

But it would not help you to decide whether the Bible is a message from God. Studying the Bible for ourselves is the only way we can do that. And we can study the Bible without knowing any science, or even any of the more useful subjects like Hebrew and Greek and ancient history. The only essential equipment is a thoughtful, enquiring mind.

Many of the arguments in this book, especially in Parts One and Three, are based on the text of the Bible itself. Because most people are more familiar with the so-called Authorised (or King James) Version of the Bible than with any modern version, the majority of the Bible quotations are from that version. To make the quotations easier to read I have modernised the punctuation in some places. Sometimes I have slipped into the words of the English Revised Version without mentioning it, where this gives the sense of the Scriptures more clearly. Whenever any other translation has been used I have said so.

In other places I have had to base arguments on facts (and opinions) drawn from many sources. For the sake of any readers who may wish to consult the original sources of information, details of all the more important ones are given in the notes.

Where a book referred to in this way is marked with a star (\*), it means that I regard it as particularly helpful-and that it is written in language a layman can understand. Some of these starred books were written a long time ago, and may be out of print now. But they are worth the trouble of tracking them down, if you can manage it.

### ***A Modern Miracle***

Norman is a research physicist who does not believe the Bible and refuses to read it. Whenever I mention Bible prophecy to him, he smiles condescendingly.

"Of course Bible prophecies have been fulfilled," he says. "They were bound to be. They remind me of the astrology pages in Old Moore's Almanac. You know how it goes: in January, 'Bad weather increases road deaths'; in February, 'There will be many strikes in the engineering industry'; in March, 'There will be many crimes of violence and a sensational bank robbery.'

"You can't lose when you prophesy such obvious things in such vague terms. Something is sure to happen that can be made to fit each prophecy, in retrospect. And that's how it is with the Bible."

Poor Norman. He only exposes his own ignorance when he talks like that. The astonishing thing about the Bible is that it has prophesied the most unlikely things. And although some prophecies are worded in an obscure way, many others are as clear as crystal.

A good example to begin with is the way the Bible has foretold the entire history of the Jewish people over a period of more than two thousand years.

### **A Strange History**

It is quite possible that you dislike Jews. Many people do. But that is beside the point at the moment. Whatever we may think about the Jews we cannot deny that they exist, and that they have a very long and a very strange history.

In the days of Jesus Christ there was a thriving Jewish nation in the land of Israel. Hundreds of years earlier the nation had been independent, but long before Jesus was born it became a part of the Roman Empire.

The Jews did not take kindly to being ruled by foreigners. For many years the country seethed with discontent and rebellion.

Between A.D. 66 and A.D. 135 the Jews fought three fierce wars of independence. But each time they were defeated, and by A.D. 135 the Romans had had enough trouble. They were determined to stop these revolts once and for all.

With typical Roman thoroughness they utterly destroyed Jerusalem and ploughed up its site. Then they erased its name from their maps, and sent all the inhabitants of Judaea (the main part of the land of Israel) into exile.

And that, thought the Romans, was that.

But they were wrong. For century after century the Jews survived as a nation without a country. Wherever they went they were hated, treated as an inferior race, made to live in ghettos.

Take for example their history in just one country - England. We first hear of Jews coming to England in the reign of William the Conqueror. They were never made very welcome, and in

1190 a fearful wave of massacres spread from city to city, wiping out Jewish men, women and children.

For another hundred years the survivors lived an uneasy existence. Then, in 1290, Edward I expelled all the Jews from Britain.

In 1492 all Jews were expelled from Spain, and some of them came to live secretly in England, living in fear of their lives if they should be found out. It was not until 1656 that Jews were officially readmitted to England, by Oliver Cromwell.

Even then they were forced to accept the role of second-class citizens, somewhat like the coloured people in South Africa today. After many years of trying to obtain political freedom, it was only in 1858 that Jews were first allowed to sit in Britain's parliament.

In other countries they often fared worse. As recently as the 1880s Jews had to flee for their lives from Russia; in the 1930s (if they were wise) from Germany.

In short, for seventeen centuries, on and off, the exiled Jews were persecuted, massacred, or made to flee for their lives from one country to another. Yet somehow they survived it all.

Then, at the end of the last century, nearly eighteen hundred years after their ancestors were exiled from it, a few Jews began to trickle back to their homeland. Within the twentieth century the Jewish population of the land of Israel has risen from a few thousand to more than two million. By 1948 the Jews there felt sufficiently powerful to proclaim their independence. The following year the sovereign state of Israel was admitted to membership of the United Nations.

### **History Written in Advance**

With this brief summary of Jewish history in mind, look at what the Old Testament said would happen to the Jews. As you read the following Bible passages, ask yourself: "Are these prophecies vaguely worded, or are they clear and plain? And have they been fulfilled, or not?"

(1) *They would be scattered all over the world, hated, persecuted, and driven from country to country.*

"The Lord shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other.... Among these nations thou shalt find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest, but the Lord shall give thee there a trembling heart, and failing of eyes and sorrow of mind.

"And thy life shall hang in doubt before thee, and thou shalt fear day and night, and shalt have none assurance of thy life. ... And thou shalt become an astonishment, a proverb and a byword among all nations whither the Lord shall lead thee."<sup>1</sup>

(2) *Meanwhile, their land, once so fruitful, would lie desolate.*

"I will scatter you among the nations ... and your land shall be desolate, and your cities waste. Then shall the land enjoy her sabbaths, as long as it lieth desolate, and ye be in your enemies' land."<sup>2</sup>

(3) *They would survive all these troubles, and would actually outlive their persecutors.*

"Though I make a full end of all nations whither I have scattered thee, yet will I not make a full end of thee"<sup>3</sup>

“The children of Israel shall abide many days without a king and without a prince and without a sacrifice - . . . Afterward shall the children of Israel return.”<sup>4</sup>

(4) *Eventually, while still disobeying God, they would go back to their own land again.*

“I will even gather you from the people, and assemble you out of the countries where ye have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel.”<sup>5</sup>

“I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for Mine Holy Name’s sake, which ye have profaned among the nations, whither ye went.... For I will take you from among the nations, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land.”<sup>6</sup>

“It is even the time of Jacob’s (Israel’s) trouble, but he shall be saved out of it. . . . I will save thee from afar, and thy seed from the land of their captivity, and Jacob shall return.”<sup>7</sup>

These seven extracts, taken from five different books, are typical of all Old Testament teaching about the future of Israel. Everyone, believer and unbeliever alike, agrees that the Old Testament was written before the time of Christ. Consequently, it is absolutely certain that the prophecies about the Jews were written hundreds of years before they were fulfilled.

For the prophecies about the exile of the Jews were not fulfilled until the second century after Christ. The prophecies about their wanderings were fulfilled continuously from the second to the nineteenth centuries. And the prophecies about the return of the Jews to their homeland were not fulfilled until the twentieth century.

### **Uncanny Detail**

For many centuries-since long before the prophecies about the Jews’ return to the land of Israel began to be fulfilled-men have marvelled at the way Bible prophecy and Jewish history have tallied. It is no wonder that when Frederick II of Prussia asked his physician for a proof that God exists, he replied, “The Jews, Your Majesty.”

The broad correspondence between the prophecies and their fulfilment is wonderful enough. But some of the detail is enough to make the mind boggle.

In the first passage quoted above, Moses said, “thou shalt become a proverb and a byword among all nations.” How was he to know that, thousands of years later, Englishmen would use the expression, “You miserable old Jew!” when they wanted to condemn someone’s meanness? And that similarly, in nearly every major language on earth, “Jew” has been used as a term of contempt?

In the second passage, Moses declared that the land would lie desolate while the Jews were in exile. This was a most unlikely thing to suggest. It was then a prosperous, fertile land. If the Jews were driven out, you would expect their conquerors to take full advantage of their pleasant land. But did they? Listen to the words of one of Israel’s official historians, describing the period of Jewish exile:

“Meanwhile, the Land of Israel slumbered on and lay waste.

Of the ‘land flowing with milk and honey’, as it is so often lauded in Holy Writ, much became barren. The garden was now a desert and malarial swamps collected where once were smiling plains.”<sup>8</sup>

The third passage must have sounded equally preposterous when Jeremiah wrote it. God would do away with the mighty nations that persecuted Israel, but little Israel would outlive them all.

When the mighty Roman Empire crushed Jerusalem under its heel and made slaves of its inhabitants, a sacred copy of the Old Testament from the temple was carried in triumph to Rome. Just suppose that one of the Roman Emperor's courtiers had read from that Book, and said to the most powerful man on earth, "O Caesar, it prophesies here that our great Empire shall come to an end, but that these miserable Jews will live on." How the Emperor would have laughed! But the incredible prophecy came true.

Now look at the sixth passage quoted. It says that God would bring Israel back to their own land, not because of their godliness, but *despite their ungodliness*. What ordinary writer would have written such an unflattering thing about his countrymen? Yet, once more, every detail of the prophecy has come true, as the following incident shows.

A few years ago I had dinner at a scientific conference in Italy with a world-famous scientist from Haifa, in Israel. I asked him what it felt like to be fulfilling Bible prophecy as a member of God's own nation.

He gave a polite little laugh. "We don't look at it like that," he said. "Most of us who are building up the State of Israel are doing so for economic or political reasons, not because we have any religious convictions."

His words are frequently confirmed by reports from journalists visiting Israel. For example:

"One can see that the founders of the political State of Israel were for the most part sceptics or non-practising Jews.

"Mrs Meir [the Prime Minister] told me, as she had said in the Knesset [Israel's parliament] that she herself is 'a non-observant Jewess'... Many of the Israelis one meets are lax in their practices and agnostic in their... views."<sup>9</sup>

## Why Hitler Failed

There is another kind of prophecy about the Jews that has been fulfilled again and again, at different periods of history. The most spectacular fulfilment of it occurred quite recently. It related to the late Adolf Hitler and his Nazis.

In the middle 1930s Hitler's scheme to conquer the world was already in motion. By the summer of 1940s everything had gone according to plan. The whole of the mainland of Western Europe was bowing to the Nazis, and it looked as though the German war machine was unstoppable.

Yet within five years Hitler's mutilated body lay in the ruins of his Berlin headquarters, and Nazi Germany was no more. What went wrong? How did Hitler fail, after coming so close to success?

Historians usually explain Hitler's failure by listing a series of extraordinary blunders (like bombing British civilian targets instead of airfields in 1940, and invading Russia in 1941) when Hitler overruled the carefully laid plans of his own generals. But this only throws the problem a stage further back. Why did a brilliant leader like Hitler make so many fatal mistakes?

The real answer to these questions is a very simple one, but so unexpected that historians usually miss it. God had said of Israel:

“Cursed be every one that curseth thee,  
And blessed be he that blesseth thee.”<sup>10</sup>

When the Nazi party adopted Hitler's plan to wipe out the Jewish nation, it signed its own death warrant. God had warned the world that He would oppose those who opposed His nation, Israel. By murdering millions of Jews the Nazis were challenging the Almighty to His face. No wonder they lost the war!

But the German nation as a whole was ashamed of what the Nazis had done to the Jews. After the war the new German government decided to make amends for Hitler's crimes. At a time when they could ill afford to be so generous, the Germans made what has been called the greatest act of national generosity in all history.

Picture the situation in 1945. All over Germany, houses and factories lay in ruins. The cream of the nation's youth was dead or in captivity. The country was bankrupt, the people were starving. The victorious allies were demanding compensation for what they had suffered. The future for Germany looked altogether hopeless.

Yet the West German Government decided, despite their own people's desperate need for goods and money, to pay hundreds of millions of pounds in compensation to Jews who had suffered through the war. They did not lose by their generosity. The land that lay in ruins in 1945 was, by 1965, almost the richest in Europe.

Hitler had learnt that God keeps His threats: “Cursed be every one that curseth thee (Israel).”

Post-war Germany learnt that God also keeps His promises: ‘Blessed be he that blesseth thee.’”

### **For Every Effect, A Cause**

A very large number of scientists believe in God. There is **a reason** for this. America's leading space scientist Dr. Wernher von Braun, has put it in a nutshell:

“One of the most fundamental laws of natural science is that *nothing in the physical world ever happens without a cause*. There simply cannot be a creation without some kind of spiritual creator.

- . . . Anything as well ordered and perfectly created as is our earth and universe must have a Maker, a master designer.”<sup>11</sup> (The italics are mine.)

Even if you are not yet ready to agree with von Braun's conclusion about the existence of God, you are bound to accept his first sentence. Nothing ever happens without a cause. This is a fundamental law of science. It is also plain common sense.

Now apply this principle to the facts outlined in this chapter.

Thousands of years ago Moses, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Hosea (whose words have been quoted) and several other Old Testament prophets foretold the future history of the Jewish people. Their

prophecies were expressed in clear language and were full of detail. Throughout the past two thousand years everything has happened just as they said it would.

This astonishing fact cries out for an explanation. "Nothing ever happens without a cause." What was the "cause" that led all those Hebrew writers to foretell the history of their race with such uncanny accuracy?

Ask an atheist that question, and then watch his reactions. If he is an intelligent man, well informed of the facts, he is most unlikely to say, "Oh, it just happened." He knows that would only invite the rejoinder, "If you can believe that, you can believe anything!"

Instead, he will probably look very learned, and suggest that it is "the natural outcome of the religious genius of the Hebrew race". This sounds almost convincing-until you think about it. Then it reminds you of the Russian general who was asked by a Western journalist how the Russian engineers had succeeded in building rockets more powerful than anything the Americans had produced. He replied: "Quite simple. It is the inevitable consequence of a Marxist-Leninist society."

Answers like that are clever. They sound very impressive. They completely dodge the awkward question. And they explain nothing.

Yet this sort of evasion is the only answer that you are likely to get from an atheist. I say this from personal experience, because in my younger days I spent many a Saturday afternoon on a soapbox at Speaker's Corner in London's Hyde Park, surrounded by crowds of atheists. Time and again I used to put forward these facts about the Jews, and challenge the audience to explain them. But never once did I get a reasonable answer.

No, there is only one answer that fits the facts. That is the answer given by the Bible itself:

"Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but (unless) He revealeth His secret unto His servants the prophets."<sup>12</sup>

"And if thou say in thine heart, 'How shall we know the word which the Lord hath not spoken?' When a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken."<sup>13</sup>

It is as if the Bible says to us: "I will prove to you that I am a message from Almighty God. False prophets cannot foretell the future. But God's true prophets can. So I will foretell the whole history of the Jewish race."

And it has.

### ***More History Written in Advance***

While the Old Testament was being written Israel was surrounded by a number of nations, most of which no longer exist. Some of them were great powers, like Egypt, Babylonia, Assyria and Phoenicia. Others were quite small nations (just as Israel herself was a small nation) such as Syria, Edom, Moab, and Ammon.

Israel had a great deal of contact with these nations. She traded with them; sometimes she went to war with them; and all too often she was corrupted by their idolatrous religions.

Consequently the prophets of Israel sometimes mentioned these other nations. They condemned them when they behaved wickedly, and occasionally praised them when they did what God required of them. And as with Israel, only much more briefly, their future history was sometimes foretold. Whenever such prophecies were made, as John Urquhart has shown,<sup>1</sup> they were fulfilled with great accuracy.

#### **A Tale of Two cities**

Two of the most splendid cities of the ancient world were Babylon and Tyre. Babylon was the capital of the land we now call Iraq. Eventually she conquered so much territory that she ruled the mightiest empire the world had then seen. Tyre, a seaport, was the capital city of the Phoenicians. Her navy dominated the Mediterranean, and her traders owned the greatest fleet of merchant ships in the ancient world.

The Bible said plainly that each of these cities was to be punished for its wickedness. But the nature of their punishments was to be very different.

Babylon was to be destroyed, and to remain a collection of uninhabited ruins.

Tyre was also to be destroyed, but not to remain as ruins. In her case, the very stones of the city were all to be cast into the sea.

Here are the actual words of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel.

BABYLON: “And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees’ excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It shall *never be inhabited*, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation. Neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there, neither shall the shepherds make their fold there. But wild beasts of the desert shall lie there, and their houses shall be full of doleful creatures, and owls shall dwell there.”<sup>2</sup>

“It shall be *no more inhabited* for ever, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation. . . . And they shall not take of thee a stone for a corner, nor a stone for foundations, but thou shalt be *desolate for ever*, saith the Lord... And Babylon shall become heaps, a dwelling place for jackals, an astonishment, and an hissing, without an inhabitant.”<sup>3</sup>

TYRE: “And they shall make a spoil of thy riches, and make a prey of thy merchandise. And they shall break down thy walls, and destroy thy pleasant houses, and they shall lay thy

stones and thy timber and thy dust *in the midst of the water*.... And I will make thee like the top of a rock. Thou shalt be a place to spread nets upon. Thou shalt be built no more.”<sup>4</sup>

You can visit the sites of both these cities today, and see how precisely the prophecies have been fulfilled. Babylon, whose hanging gardens were once one of the seven wonders of the world, and whose surrounding countryside was then a fertile plain, now lies deserted.

Many other ancient cities have had modern cities built on top of them. But not Babylon. As far as the eye can see lie the deserted heaps of ruins, an archaeologist's paradise, just waiting to be excavated. Not even a Bedouin encampment breaks the monotony, for the ruins are too inhospitable to provide grazing for their flocks, and in any case they have a reputation of being haunted. Only wild beasts and birds find a dwelling place among the fallen towers of Babylon.

Now read again the words of Isaiah and Jeremiah quoted above. Ask yourself: how were they able to describe this scene so accurately? For more than a thousand years their words have, in effect, challenged the world: “Re-inhabit Babylon, and you will prove the Bible false!” But nobody has taken up the challenge.

If you wish to survey the ruins of ancient Tyre, however, you really should have a frogman's suit. History tells how the ruins of the city really were cast into the sea, hundreds of years after Ezekiel had said they would be. In 332 B.C. Alexander the Great wanted to subdue an island fortress off the coast, near the ruins of the former city. He achieved his aim by building a causeway Out to the island, and he used the remains of ancient Tyre for material.

Every scrap of rubble from the ruins of Tyre was used by Alexander, so that the site really was, as Ezekiel put it, “made like the top of a rock”. Moreover, as the prophet foretold, the site of the old city was never built on again. The city of Tyre mentioned in the New Testament, and which still exists today, stands on an entirely different site.

When they were first uttered, these prophecies about Babylon and Tyre must have sounded most unlikely to be fulfilled. Yet fulfilled they were, down to the last detail.

## **World History in a Nutshell**

One of the most fascinating prophecies in the whole Bible is contained in Daniel chapter 2. Here, in the space of only 49 verses, we are given a bird's-eye view of world history, from about 600 B.C. down to the present day and beyond.

The late Mr. Henry Ford is often quoted as having said, “History is bunk.” But according to his friends, what he actually said was this: “History as it is generally taught in schools is bunk.”

If this really was what he said, he was right. Badly taught history can be deadly dull. Perhaps this is why the history lesson-in-advance of Daniel 2 is given to us in such an unusual and interesting way. It is in the form of a parable. But we do not have to guess at its meaning. Like some of the parables of Jesus, this one is accompanied by an explanation.

You really ought to read the whole chapter for yourself. But in case you don't feel like doing so just now, here is a summary.

King Nebuchadnezzar, ruler of the mighty Babylonian Empire, had a dream. It was a strange dream, and it worried him. He felt sure that it was no ordinary dream, but that it meant something. So he called for the royal astrologers and soothsayers and asked them to explain the dream.

The astrologers then made the obvious request. "Tell thy servants the dream, and we will show the interpretation."<sup>5</sup>

But the king was no fool. He was not going to play into their hands. Any self-styled magician with a good imagination could concoct an "explanation" if he were told the dream. So he put them to the test. "*You show me the dream-and its interpretation!*"<sup>6</sup> he demanded. As an inducement to do so he added the interesting information that, if they failed, they would all be cut in pieces.

Fortunately for the gentlemen whose bluff had been called, there was a young Jewish captive in Babylon. He saved their lives (and his own) by going to the king and saying: "The secret which the king hath demanded cannot the wise men, the astrologers, the magicians, the soothsayers, show unto the king. But there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets, and maketh known to the King Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days."<sup>7</sup>

Daniel explained that what the king had seen was a great, fearsome statue of a man. But it was no ordinary statue. Its construction was weird and wonderful. It was like this:

- (1) Its head was made of gold.
- (2) Its chest and arms were silver.
- (3) The lower part of the trunk and the thighs were brass.
- (4) The legs were iron.
- (5) The feet were an awkward mixture of iron and clay.

The dreaming king had stared in wonder at this strange figure for a while. Then he noticed something beginning to happen. Some distance away from the statue a stone was being quarried. But there were no quarrymen to be seen. It was as if the stone were being carved out by invisible hands.

Then the fresh-hewn stone moved towards the statue, and struck it violently upon its brittle feet of iron and clay. This brought the statue crashing down, and then the stone attacked the ruins. It broke the gold, the silver, the brass, the iron and the clay into tiny pieces. Then the wind sprang up and blew all the debris away in a cloud of dust, so that the stone was left alone.

Finally, the triumphant stone began to expand. It grew and grew and grew until it had become a great mountain. Before the king awoke, he saw the stone become so vast that it filled the whole world.

### **Daniel Explains**

"This is the dream, and we will tell the interpretation thereof",<sup>8</sup> said Daniel.

The king listened intently to Daniel's explanation. He realised that Daniel was the possessor of superhuman knowledge. Within a few minutes the mighty man would be kneeling down before Daniel, and saying, "Of a truth, it is that your God is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets."<sup>9</sup>

Meanwhile, this was the secret that Daniel had revealed. The statue was a kind of "map" of world history, with a time scale running from top to bottom. Like any small-scale map, this one could not attempt to show any detail, but only the broad outline of history. And the outline was this:

- (1) The golden head was Nebuchadnezzar's own great empire.<sup>10</sup>
- (\* His empire was to be followed by a second (the silver chest and **arms**).<sup>11</sup>
- (3) After that would come "another third kingdom of brass, *which shall bear rule over all the earth*".<sup>12</sup>  
(Note how the words in italics show that Daniel is not talking about local kingdoms, but about what might be called "world empires"-bearing in mind that the known world in those days was a great deal smaller than it is today.)
- (4) The iron represented a fourth great empire, which would be the strongest of them all.<sup>13</sup>
- (5) But after this the world empire would be divided, never to be reunited by human hands. As Daniel put it, "The kingdom (empire) shall be divided . . . as the toes of the feet were part of iron and part of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly broken... they shall not cleave (join) one to another, even as iron is not mixed (joined) with clay."<sup>14</sup>
- (6) Eventually, at a time when the world was still full of disunited nations, God would intervene. "In the days of these (disunited) kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed ... but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms and it shall stand for ever."<sup>15</sup>

### Has it Happened?

Since God has not yet intervened openly in world affairs, Stage 6 must still lie in the future. But what of the first five sections of the prophecy; have they been fulfilled, or not?

We cannot all be historians, so we must compare the prophecy with a history book. H. G. Wells' *Short History of the World*<sup>16</sup> is doubly suitable for this purpose. First, because it is very brief (250 pages) 50 that, like Daniel 2, it gives a bird's-eye view-"shorn of elaborations and complications", as the author says in his preface. Secondly, since Wells was famous for his anti-religious views, we can be quite certain that he did not frame his book to fit Daniel 2.

Yet a careful look at the contents page of Wells' book shows that he recognised four, and only four, great empires in the ancient world. Until modern times, when he speaks of the colonial "empires" of the European powers (which were, of course, quite unlike the world-empires of the past) the only chapter headings that mention empires are these:

- XX The Last Babylonian Empire and the Empire of Darius I
- XXVI The Empire of Alexander the Great
- XXXIII The Growth of the Roman Empire

- XXXV The Common Man's Life under the Early Roman Empire
- XXXVI Religious Developments under the Roman Empire
- XXXIX The Barbarians Break the Empire into East and West
  - XL The Huns and the End of the Western Empire
  - XLI The Byzantine and Sassanid Empires

What are these empires that Wells mentions?

He begins, like Daniel, with the Babylonian Empire of Nebuchadnezzar.

His second empire is "the Empire of Darius I". In the text of his book he explains that this was the Empire of the Medes and Persians, which swallowed up and succeeded the Babylonian Empire. A later chapter in Daniel<sup>17</sup> also names the conquerors as the Medes and Persians, and their emperor as Darius.

Another chapter in Daniel<sup>18</sup> stated that the Medes and Persians would be conquered in their turn by the Greeks. This ties up with Wells' next chapter heading, "The Empire of Alexander the Great", who was the greatest of the Greek rulers.

Fourthly, Wells comes to the Roman Empire, which was so important and lasted so long that it occupies several chapters. (A hint of its greatness was given by Daniel when he said, "the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron".)

In Chapter xxxix Wells speaks of the splitting of the Roman Empire into two halves, East and West. Chapter XL tells what happened to the Western Empire, and Chapter XLI the Eastern Empire (the Byzantine-Sassanid half of the Roman Empire). Here again is a remarkable correspondence with Daniel: the empire that ended its day split into two parts is represented in Daniel by two legs.

Daniel was quite emphatic that this fourth empire would be permanently divided. He was right. Wells' book makes it perfectly clear that after the final extinction of Rome there has never been another all-powerful world empire.

But this conclusion—that the empire of Rome was the last world empire—is too important to rest upon the testimony of Wells alone. So here are some words by one of the greatest of all historians, Gibbon. He, like Wells, did not believe in the Bible, and certainly did not write this passage with the intention of supporting Daniel.

"The division of Europe into a number of independent states, connected, however, with each other by the general resemblance of religion, language and manners, is productive of the most beneficial consequences to the liberty of mankind. A modern tyrant... would soon experience a gentle restraint from the example of his equals, the dread of present censure, the advice of his allies, and the apprehension of his enemies.  
 ... *But the empire of the Romans filled the world, and when that empire fell into the hands of a single person, the world became a safe and dreary prison for his enemies.*"<sup>19</sup> (The italics are mine.)

Here, then, is another remarkable fact about the Bible that demands explanation. The prophet declared that there would be four world empires, *and only four*. A twentieth-century historian, unbeliever though he was, admitted that this has happened.

How did the prophet manage to foresee this? How did he know that the fourth empire would be the strongest of them all? That it would be divided into halves? And, above all, how did he know that never again would some power-hungry conqueror unite western civilisation under one rule?

The unbelievers' attempts to explain the facts are pathetic. The best they can do is to argue (despite a lack of conclusive evidence) that the prophecy was not written by Daniel, but by an unknown forger writing in the days of the Greeks.

All this does is to evade the facts, not to explain them. Even if the unbelievers were right in saying that the book of Daniel was written in the third century B.C. instead of the sixth, what of it? That would still leave 2,200 years of fulfilled prophecy to account for!

Once again the only explanation that really fits the facts is the Bible's own explanation: "There is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets, and maketh known... what shall be in the latter days."<sup>20</sup>

### **Another Reason for Prophecy**

The motto of one politician (his friends call him George) is this:

"When you can't reasonably answer an opponent, poke fun at him. The audience will laugh, and forget that he has a better case than you."

George, who is an unbeliever, applies the same tactics to the Bible. When he is faced with arguments based on fulfilled prophecy, he makes no attempt to answer them. He just grins, and talks like this.

"So the Bible is like a racing tipster, is it? The horsey fellow says, 'I picked the winners of the last two races, didn't I? So you can trust me to give you a good tip for the three-thirty'. And the Bible says, 'I've foretold a few things about this world. So you can trust me to give you a few tips about the next.'"

Poor George. His crude caricature only reveals his complete ignorance of the Bible. For one thing, unlike the racing tipster, the Bible is right every time. But there is an even more important fallacy in his attitude. Bible prophecy is not just a matter of: "Such-and-such will happen; it has happened; therefore I was right." Bible prophecy is not just a lot of bits and pieces. *Bible prophecy is a vital part of God's message to mankind.*

From Genesis to Revelation the Bible tells one connected story. It starts with the creation of a beautiful world, and says how man brought tragedy into it. It goes on to explain how God introduced a wonderful Plan to put things right. How He first raised up a chosen people; then provided a Saviour from among the chosen race; then sent that Saviour's followers to preach the gospel to all nations; and how at last that Saviour will return to earth, to judge the living and the dead, and to fill the earth with God's glory.

But the Bible was not written all at once. It was written a book at a time, over a period of some fifteen hundred years.

During that time God's Plan was steadily unfolding, step by step. And all the time the Bible was gradually telling how the Plan was getting on. It recorded each important step in the working

out of the Plan. And it frequently foretold future developments in the Plan, many of which have already happened, although some have still to take place.

Now we can look at Daniel 2 in a new light. Previously it was nothing more than powerful evidence that “there is none like God, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done”.<sup>21</sup> But now we can see it as a picture of human history guided by God, moving towards a wonderful climax.

The stone that grinds the statue to pieces, and then grows until it fills the whole earth, is Jesus Christ. He quoted the words of Daniel about that stone, and applied them to Himself.<sup>22</sup> This last scene in Nebuchadnezzar's dream will be fulfilled when Jesus returns to the earth.

But this is going too fast. There are many interesting Bible prophecies about the events leading up to Christ's Second Coming. They must have a chapter to themselves.

And before the Second Coming there had to be a First Coming. The Old Testament is full of prophecies about that. We must have a look at those first.

### **Preview of Calvary**

One evening a few years ago I carried out an interesting experiment. I was with a friend who did not believe the Bible, and, like most unbelievers, knew very little about it. But at least he was willing to discuss it.

So I said to him: "Excuse me, Arthur. Do you mind if I give you a little Bible quiz? I'd like to read to you a well-known Bible passage about Jesus, and then see if you can tell me whereabouts in the New Testament it comes from? Will you have a try?"

"O.K., I'm game. I don't mind exposing my ignorance," said Arthur. So I read him a few verses about the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ, and then stopped.

Arthur wrinkled his brows. "I know the words all right. But I've no idea which gospel they come from. Or maybe they even come from one of Paul's epistles," he added as an afterthought.

"No, they don't originally come from any of those places, although they are quoted by several New Testament writers," I said. "I was reading to you from the book of Isaiah, in the Old Testament."

"In the *Old* Testament? You're kidding!"

But I wasn't kidding. I was satisfying myself that some of the Old Testament prophecies of Jesus really do fit Him so well that they can be mistaken for New Testament passages.

### **Jesus Knew About Prophecy**

On a number of occasions Jesus reminded His followers that the Old Testament was full of prophecies about Himself. Here is just one example:

"He (Jesus) took unto Him the twelve, and said unto them, 'Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and *all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man shall be accomplished*. For He shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on. And they shall scourge Him and put Him to death. And the third day He shall rise again.'"<sup>1</sup>

Jesus was not exaggerating. Most of the dreadful things that happened to Him during the last twenty-four hours of His mortal life were foretold in the Old Testament. So was His resurrection, and His ascension to heaven, too. Yet the whole of the Old Testament was already yellow with age when Jesus was born.

You may perhaps wonder whether the early Christians might have cunningly altered the wording of the Old Testament prophecies, to make them fit the events. But there is no fear of that. The Christians kept their own copies of the Bible in the Greek language, while the Jews kept their copies of the Old Testament in Hebrew.

The best copies of the Old Testament, upon which our English Bible is based, are the Jewish ones. It is quite certain that the Jews would never have altered their copies of the Scriptures, so as to further the claims of a rival religion.

We need to look in detail at two of the chapters that Jesus would have had in mind. If you want to appreciate fully the wonder of these prophecies, turn them up in your own Bible. As you read them, keep asking yourself this question: how could the writers have foreseen these things, unless God inspired them?

PSALM 22 describes the Man of God being put to death by His enemies. Instead of using the common Jewish method of execution (stoning) they “pierce his hands and feet”.<sup>2</sup> He is tormented by thirst as he dies.<sup>3</sup> His enemies stand round him.<sup>4</sup> They stare at him.<sup>5</sup> They laugh at him.<sup>6</sup> They jeer at him, asking why God does not rescue him.<sup>7</sup> They strip off his clothes and share them out, casting lots for the odd one left over.<sup>8</sup>

If you are familiar with the gospels, you will recognise each of these details. It all adds up to a picture of Calvary, painted hundreds of years before it happened.

ISAIAH 53 fills in more of the details. He was to be “despised and rejected” by his fellow men, a “man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief”.<sup>9</sup> He would be wounded and flogged,<sup>10</sup> led as a condemned prisoner to his execution.<sup>11</sup> Yet he would accept his fate meekly and without speaking in his own defence,<sup>12</sup> although he was innocent of any crime.<sup>13</sup>

The chapter insists that this was not just another martyrdom. Seven times over (in verses 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11 and 12) it explains that this righteous man’s death would be an atonement for the sins of others. Because of this, God would raise him from the dead,<sup>14</sup> and give him a position of great honour.<sup>15</sup>

It is no wonder that when I read this chapter to Arthur, he thought it occurred in the New Testament. If it did so, people would accept it as a great piece of Christian literature, a beautiful poetic description of the sufferings of Jesus Christ. But it is not a Christian writing. It is found in the Old Testament, the Holy Book of the Jews - a nation that had always hated the thought of human sacrifice, and has never accepted Jesus.

The official Jewish interpretation is that this chapter describes the Jewish race, not Jesus. One look at the chapter is enough to show how absurd this interpretation is. Every verse fits Jesus; half of them could not possibly be applied to the Jews. Try fitting these extracts to the Jews (or, for that matter, to any other nation):

“He had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.

(verse 9)

“By his knowledge shall My Righteous Servant justify many, for he shall bear their iniquities.”

(verse 11)

Even the Jews are not comfortable with their own interpretation. They dislike this chapter, and avoid reading it in their synagogue. But though they try to ignore it they cannot destroy it. Isaiah 5 remains a lasting proof of the superhuman origin of the Bible.

### **Who Was Messiah?**

It is difficult for us to appreciate the full significance of these prophecies without knowing what the Old Testament word “Messiah” meant to the Jews at the time of Jesus. Even today, it still means quite a lot to them. A Jewish encyclopaedia says this about what it calls “Messianism”:

“The term ‘Mashiah’ is used in the Bible . . . it was applied an ideal king, who would bring salvation to Israel and a regeneration of the human race . . .”<sup>16</sup>

Historians tell us that in the first century Israel was positively buzzing with excitement at the prospect of Messiah’s coming. They were convinced that the time for Messiah to appear was “now, or never”. Their conviction was based upon the following passage in the book of Daniel:

“Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy. Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks; the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times. And after threescore and two weeks *shall Messiah be cut off.*”<sup>17</sup>

The Jews paid no attention to the words in italics, because they did not understand them. “Cut off” was a common Old Testament expression meaning “killed”,<sup>18</sup> and the Jews did not see how Messiah could possibly be killed. They knew lots of splendid prophecies about the coming Messiah: he was going to be a great and glorious leader, the deliverer of Israel, and king of the whole world. So they turned a blind eye to the passages (including Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53) that spoke of Messiah’s death.

But what did excite them was Daniel’s promise that Messiah would appear some 69 or 70 “weeks” after the commandment to rebuild Jerusalem (which in Daniel’s day was lying in ruins). The Hebrew word for “week” is the ordinary word for “seven”, and they knew that in the prophets it could mean either seven days or seven years.<sup>19</sup>

So the Jews had long been waiting for Daniel’s period of 483 to 490 years (69 to 70 “weeks”) to elapse. They were not sure of the exact starting point of the prophecy, because there had been several “commandments to restore and to build Jerusalem” around the end of the sixth and the beginning of the fifth centuries B.C.

But one thing at least was clear to them: Messiah would have to come sometime in the earlier part of what we now call the first century A.D.

From Daniel 9, therefore, we can add two more to the growing list of prophecies fulfilled when Jesus first came:

(1) He came at just about the right time in history.

(2) He was killed, just as Daniel foretold the Messiah would be.

But, what is even more important, we have learnt something about the way the Jews understood the Old Testament. There are scores of Old Testament passages that speak about a Very Important Person who was to come. This Person was occasionally referred to as “Messiah” in the Hebrew Bible (although the word appears in the English Old Testament only in Daniel 9), but in most cases he is unnamed. *Nevertheless the Jews accepted all these passages as prophecies of the Messiah.*

It is essential that we keep this fact in mind. Some of those passages may not look to an English reader as if they are prophecies of the Messiah. But the Bible was not written, in the first

place, for English-speaking people. It was written by Hebrews, for Hebrews. And the ancient Hebrews had a very different literary style from modern Europeans.

The ancient Jews themselves had no doubt at all that those passages were prophecies of the Messiah. Consequently we are bound to take the Jews' word for it, and look at the prophecies in the same way as they did.

### **More Prophecies of Messiah**

There are so many of these prophecies that it is difficult to know when to stop. Here are five more to add to the list:

*(1) He was to be born in Bethlehem.*

“But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto Me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.”<sup>20</sup>

We all know that Jesus actually was born in Bethlehem. That an established fact. Even those arch-enemies of the Christian faith the Pharisees and Sadducees, never denied it. But has it ever occurred to you how unlikely it was for that prophecy to have been fulfilled by accident?

Bethlehem was, as the prophecy mentioned, a very small place. some unscrupulous gentleman wanted to establish a reputation for himself as a prophet, he might take a gamble and say, “The next president of the United States will be a man born in New York.” many leading Americans are New Yorkers that at least he would stand a sporting chance of being right.

But suppose that he said “The next president of the United States will be born in Piketon, Ohio.” Since Piketon has only a few thousand inhabitants the odds against his guess being right would be enormous. Yet Micah picked a similarly insignificant village as the birthplace of the Messiah-and his prophecy came true.

How did Micah manage it, unless he was inspired by God?

*(2) He was to enter Jerusalem on an ass.*

I can imagine your reaction to that statement. “Well, so what? Lots of people entered Jerusalem on asses, didn't they? Why shouldn't Jesus do so, too-especially if He had read the prophecy that said He had to?”

For a very good reason. Lots of people did indeed enter Jerusalem on asses, but they were all ordinary, humble folk. Conquering kings were far too high and mighty to ride asses. They rode on mules warhorses, or in chariots. And the prophet said that it was as King of Jerusalem, King of the World, that Jesus would arrive at His capital city on a humble donkey. Here are Zechariah's words:

“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass . . . and he shall speak peace unto the nations, and his dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth.”<sup>21</sup>

When these words were written, they would have seemed utterly ridiculous. What king would ever become “lowly, and riding upon an ass”? And if he ever did approach his capital in such an improper fashion, would his people “rejoice greatly” and “shout” their approval of such behaviour? How absurd it must all have sounded!

And yet, when it happened, it all seemed perfectly natural. Jesus was a poor man, a humble man, a man of peace. It would have been unthinkable for Him to have mounted a warhorse. Yet at the same time He had the bearing, the strength of character, the dynamic personality and the personal magnetism of a mighty king.

So when Jesus deliberately rode into Jerusalem in the way that Zechariah had said He must, nobody laughed. Instead, great crowds carpeted His path with their own clothing, and shouted their acknowledgement that He was their King.<sup>22</sup>

Without this response from the crowd, any attempt by Jesus to fulfil Zechariah's prophecy would have been a farce. But as it turned Out, an utterly improbable prophecy came true.

*(3) He was to be uniquely righteous.*

Suppose we ask the question: “Why should God bless Messiah so richly, by making him so much greater than anyone else?”

Several correct answers could be given. This is the reason given in Psalm 45:

“Thou art fairer than the children of men  
 Grace is poured into thy lips  
*Therefore* God hath blessed thee for ever.”<sup>23</sup>  
 “Thou hast loved righteousness and hated wickedness  
*Therefore* God, thy God, hath anointed thee  
 With the oil of gladness above thy fellows.”<sup>24</sup>

The answer is clear. God would bless Messiah so richly because of his perfect speech and his perfect behaviour. Consequently, only a perfect man could claim to be Messiah. An unrighteous self-styled Messiah would soon have been exposed as a fraud.

Jesus made this claim. “Which of you convicteth Me of sin?” He asked.<sup>25</sup> No one took up His challenge.

His disciples, who knew Him intimately, were clearly convinced of His utter sinlessness. The whole Christian gospel of salvation was based upon a belief in a sinless sacrifice. As Peter put it:

“Ye were redeemed with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot . . . who did no sin . . . For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust.”<sup>26</sup>

Now suppose that this had not been true. Suppose that Jesus had actually been as imperfect as everybody else. Isn't it obvious that in that case Christianity would have been stillborn? The Pharisees and Sadducees stopped at nothing-not even at persecution and murder

-in their attempts to stifle the preaching of the early disciples. Yet they could have destroyed the very foundation of Christianity by bringing evidence that Jesus was a sinner.

But they failed to do it.

Why?

One answer stands out as being far more likely than any other. *They could not.* Jesus fulfilled the prophecy that Messiah would be a sinless man.

*(4)He was to rise from the dead.*

Did Jesus rise from the dead? This question is so important that a whole chapter must be devoted to it. For now, it is enough to put on record that the Old Testament prophesied that He would.

“My flesh also shall rest in hope  
 For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell,  
 Neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.  
 Thou wilt shew me the path of life.  
 In thy presence is fulness of joy;  
 At thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.”<sup>27</sup>

This prophecy is easier to understand in the original Hebrew than in the English. The word translated “hell” in the second line is the Hebrew word *Sheol* which simply means “the place of the dead”. In about thirty places in our Old Testament it is translated “the grave”.

As the Apostle Peter pointed out<sup>28</sup> the Psalm clearly means that, although Messiah would be buried, his body would not rot away in the grave. He would be raised up by God to a new life of everlasting Joy.

At this stage you must reserve your judgement as to whether this prophecy was fulfilled, or not. After you have read Chapter 7, you may be able to decide.

*(5)He was to ascend to heaven.*

Another prophecy which must have been impossible to understand at the time was written by King David:

“The Lord said unto my lord, ‘Sit thou at My right hand, Until I make thine enemies thy footstool’.”<sup>29</sup>  
 “The Lord hath sworn and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever  
 After the order of Melchizedek.”<sup>30</sup>

The astonishing thing about this Psalm of David is that it exists in the Jewish scriptures at all. Humanly speaking, it has no business to be there. From a Jewish point of view, it should never have been written, or, if written, it should have been burnt at once, as heresy.

Many prophecies declare that Messiah was to be a descendant of David. In accordance with oriental custom, this meant that he should be subordinate to David. Yet in the opening line, David refers to Messiah as “*my lord*”.

Whatever made David do that? Jesus asked this question of the rabbis, and they could not answer.<sup>31</sup> It did not make sense to them.

The next two lines were (and still are) equally baffling to the Jews. Since Messiah is to be king of the world, why should he have to ascend to heaven and wait there for some time before being given power on earth?

The last three lines of the passage quoted above are even more surprising, if you know the Old Testament background. This Messiah who Sits in heaven is to be an everlasting priest, "after the order of Melchizedek".

The point of this is that Messiah, like all Jewish kings, had to be of the tribe of Judah. But Jewish priests could only come from the tribe of Levi, and consequently a king could not possibly be a priest. King Uzziah tried to do a priest's job once, and God immediately punished him for it.<sup>32</sup>

How, then, could Messiah be a priest? The answer lies in the reference to Melchizedek. This man is mentioned only once before in the Bible, and that in the very beginning, way back in the book of Genesis. Melchizedek was a priest to Abraham, and he was also a king.<sup>33</sup>

Moreover, as one New Testament writer pointed out,<sup>34</sup> he was an even greater man than Abraham who paid him tithes. Consequently his priestly order must have been far higher than that of the priests descended from Abraham.

The priests of Israel must have winced every time they read that psalm. It was both baffling and painful. It implied that their own order of priesthood would come to an end, and give way to a greater order when Messiah came. Yet those same priests had somehow been compelled to keep that uncomfortable psalm for centuries, safely preserved along with the rest of their Scriptures.

Once more we have a strange fact that demands an explanation. How did a psalm that could never have made sense to its writer come to be written? How did it come to be accepted as part of the Jewish Scriptures? Why did the priests, who must have found it so embarrassing-mg, keep it and not destroy it?

And above all, how does it happen that the events recorded in the New Testament fit the psalm so perfectly? That they, and they alone, bring the psalm to life and fill it with meaning?

I have heard only one explanation that fits all the facts. The psalm must be a prophecy given by God. The New Testament account of Jesus ascending to heaven, to be a priest for His followers and to await the time of His Second Coming, must be true.

## **Taking Stock**

Some very important facts have been established in this chapter.

There is clear evidence that most of the main events described in the gospels were foretold in the Old Testament. These include the crucifixion (with very much detail), the approximate date of Christ's appearance, His birthplace, the extraordinary nature of His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, His perfect character, His resurrection, His ascension to heaven, His heavenly priesthood, and the promise of His Second Coming.

How do the unbelievers explain these facts?

Not very well. I think I am being fair to them in saying that these are the alternatives they offer you:

*(1) Perhaps Jesus deliberately fulfilled the prophecies.*

One theory is that He spent years swotting up the Old Testament until He knew all the Messianic prophecies, and then went around fulfilling them. But this bristles with difficulties. To begin with, how did Jesus contrive to get Himself born in Bethlehem? How did He manage to achieve what no other human being has managed: a sinless life? Did He really arrange to be tortured to death, just because prophecy required it? And if so, how did He persuade His executioners to comply with all the detailed requirements of the prophecy? And what about His resurrection and ascension to heaven?

Obviously that won't do.

*(2) Perhaps the early Christians twisted the Old Testament.*

It has been suggested that the first Christians "saw" prophecies in the Old Testament where no prophecies really existed—that they twisted the meaning of the Old Testament to bolster up their own preaching.

But that won't do, either. The early Christians interpreted their Old Testament in the same way that Jews had always done. Even the unbelieving Jews never denied that the Old Testament was full of Messianic prophecies. The Jews merely denied that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah, because He did not behave as they thought the Messiah ought to behave.

*(3) Perhaps the early Christians distorted the facts of history.*

According to this theory the events recorded in the gospels never took place at all. This treats the New Testament as nothing more than a collection of legends, compounded to make it look as if Old Testament prophecy was being fulfilled.

That was a popular excuse in Queen Victoria's day, but it does not hold water nowadays. We know now that the gospels were written while plenty of eyewitnesses were still alive. (Chapter 16 gives the evidence for this.) And besides, the moral tone of the New Testament is so high that it simply cannot be the work of men who cooked up stories to deceive the public.

Well, what do *you* think?

Which is easier? Which is more reasonable?

To believe that the prophecies of the Old Testament were fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth?

Or to believe the feeble explanations of the unbelievers?

### ***Jesus Foretells Twentieth-Century Problems***

Very few people ever think of Jesus Christ as a prophet. Yet He was. He made many predictions about the future, all of which have either come true already, or are beginning to come true now.

Some of His predictions must have sounded utterly improbable at the time He made them. Yet they came true. Take this one, for instance:

“And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations.”<sup>1</sup>

When Jesus spoke those words, He had only a handful of followers, and those were mostly uneducated working-class men. He had completely failed to convert His own small nation. The ordinary people were mostly unmoved by His message, and the leaders hated Him like poison. Within a few weeks they would have Him hanging on a cross.

By all the laws of human probability, that should have been the end of it. Those who watched Him die must have thought, “Well, we shan’t hear any more of Him and His confounded gospel!”

But they were wrong. Within their own lifetime, His gospel was being preached over most of the Roman Empire. Since then it really has been preached to every nation on earth—the only religion that has. The words of Jesus have been translated into more than a thousand different languages.

Bibles by the million are spread abroad each year. They go by ship to the tropics, by air to the arctic, by rail and road and forest trail to the farthest corners of the earth. Brave men and women risk life and liberty smuggling Bibles into the communist countries of Eastern Europe.

### **Facts and Fashions**

Yes, Jesus was a prophet whose words came true. This is a good reason for listening carefully to what He has to say about our own day.

But first, a word of warning. Fashions come and fashions go. Yet facts are stubborn things. Facts remain the same while fashions change and change.

And fashions are not restricted to the way people dress. There are changing fashions in the way people behave and think. There are even fashions in scientific thought and in religious outlook.

So beware of thinking that today’s fashion is necessarily right. Remember that tomorrow’s fashion will probably be quite different. “Everybody’s doing it” may be a good excuse for going along with the crowd, but it is a very poor reason.

A hundred years ago it was quite fashionable to believe in the Second Coming of Christ. Today it is fashionable to ridicule the idea of the Second Coming.

But what of it? Don’t let the fashion-mongers beguile you. It is only the fashion that has changed. The basic facts are the same as they always were. And such new facts as have come to light in recent years make it easier to believe in the Second Coming, not harder.

The first great fact is that Jesus promised, very plainly and emphatically, that He would come again.

The second great fact is that He described what would be happening in the world at the time of His return.

And the third great fact is that the events He foretold are developing in our world today.

So don't be put off by the force of public opinion. Remember how often in the past public opinion has been proved wrong. The facts are so important that they deserve to be looked at squarely, to see what lies behind them.

Do not be put off, either, because in the past a number of cranks have believed in the Second Coming, and have persuaded some people to do some very foolish things. There have always been plenty of unbalanced people in the world, but their foolish actions are best forgotten.

Quite a lot of lunatics killed themselves trying to fly before aircraft were invented-but that is no reason to dispute the fact of modern aviation. Similarly, quite a number of poor deluded people have been known to dispose of all their possessions and climb a mountain "to wait for Jesus"-but that is no reason to dispute the actual facts about the Second Coming.

### **World in a Mess**

We had better face it: the world is in a terrible predicament. While life in our affluent society goes gaily on, the most appalling forces are building up behind the scenes. The world is heading, helter-skelter, for a crisis too horrible to contemplate.

But we *must* contemplate it for a few moments, however horrible it may be, because there is no other way to get at the facts. Here, then, is a summary of the six great problems facing the world today.

(1) *Terrible Weapons.* On August 6th 1945 the Japanese city of Hiroshima was wiped out by an atomic bomb. The same day Sir Winston Churchill made a statement about it, which was published a few days later in a British Government white paper. His statement ended like this:

"We must indeed pray that these awful agencies will be made to conduce to peace among the nations, and that instead of wreaking measureless havoc upon the entire globe, they may become a perennial fountain of world prosperity."<sup>2</sup>

But the bomb that filled Churchill with awe and dread seems like a mere firework compared with the bombs of today. In 1968 Lord Ritchie-Calder did a few sums, and estimated the explosive power of all the atomic weapons existing then. It worked out at the equivalent of 100 tons of old-fashioned explosive (TNT) for every man, woman and child on earth.<sup>3</sup>

To put it another way, if we assume, that the average street has 200 people living in it, then there was already enough atomic explosive in 1968 to provide one Hiroshima-sized bomb for every street in the world.

But bombs are not all. Nobody knows what horrors are being prepared in the secret germ-warfare laboratories of the great powers. A few years ago a British scientist in one of these labs

died from a new germ he had helped to cultivate. "Good job he didn't sneeze before he died," a colleague is reported to have said. "He might have started an epidemic that would have wiped out the human race."

One thing is quite certain. World war would mean world catastrophe. The vital question is: can man preserve world peace?

(2) *Political Tension.* The goal of all communists has always been clear. They are determined to turn the whole world communist. America and the Western Powers are equally determined to stop them. Unless one side gives way, sooner or later a head-on collision must occur. And so far neither side shows any sign of giving in.

The danger of all-out war between Russia and China is also much greater than most people realise. In a book with the grim title, *The Coming War Between Russia and China*,<sup>4</sup> a foreign affairs expert reveals the frightening facts. Communists always have quarrelled among themselves, and the two great communist countries are already fully prepared to fight each other with atomic weapons.

(3) *Exploding Populations.* More than half the population of the world is underfed now. Every year there are fifty million more mouths to feed. In thirty-five years time the world's population is expected to be double what it is today.

It is the poor nations whose populations are growing the fastest.

Every year they grow poorer, while the rich nations grow richer. Sooner or later the cry is bound to come, "Shall we starve-or fight?"

(4) *Plundered Resources.* Man has already cut down more than half the world's forests, and turned vast areas of fertile land into desert. He is exterminating much of the earth's wildlife, and using up mineral deposits at an alarming rate. As the world's remaining resources dwindle, nations will become more and more tempted to fight for what is left.

(5) *Pollution.* Man has turned many of the world's rivers into sewers, and one of its greatest lakes into a cesspool where few fish can survive. By filling the air with fumes he has impaired the health of millions, and is in danger of changing the climate of the whole planet. If he goes on like this for another century, man could easily make the earth uninhabitable.

(6) *Loss of Moral Sense.* A little while ago I met a Chinese scientist from Formosa. "What's the religious situation in the more prosperous parts of Asia today?" I asked him over lunch.

"Just the same as it is in Europe," he replied. "Many people still claim to hold the old Eastern religions, just as England still calls itself a Christian country'. But as with you, so with us: the old religions no longer mean anything to most people. We have our 'permissive society' just like yours."

When faith goes, morals are bound to slip. So all the advanced nations have a crime wave, rapidly growing problems of alcoholism, drug addiction and juvenile violence.

One day in 1969 the police in Montreal went on strike for just twelve hours. Yet that was long enough for the city to be terrorised, when thousands of normally law-abiding citizens went berserk. The “civilised” world today is only one step away from a return to the jungle.

### Jesus Answers a Question

“Well, so what?” said my friend Norman one day, when I was telling him about these things. “The world’s in a mess, right enough. But then it’s often been in a mess. Jesus didn’t need to be a prophet to foretell that the world would have a load of trouble. Anybody could have foreseen that. And, anyway, what makes you think it was our particular, twentieth-century, mess that Jesus spoke about?”

There is a very satisfactory answer to Norman’s question. To appreciate it we must take a close look at what Jesus said, and how He came to say it.

One day, not long before He was crucified, His disciples referred to the magnificent Temple that was Jerusalem’s pride and joy. Jesus startled them by commenting that it was going to be utterly destroyed.

So they asked Him the obvious question-when? And then they added a second question. They said:

“Tell us, when shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of Thy coming, and of the end of the world?”<sup>5</sup>

In reply Jesus talked at great length. He described how there would be a period of trouble for the nation, and of persecution for His disciples. Then, He said, an enemy army would besiege Jerusalem, and terrible events would follow.<sup>6</sup> He continued:

“For these be the days of vengeance, that *all things which are written may be fulfilled.*”<sup>7</sup>

The words in italics are very important. When Jesus spoke of things “written”, as He did many times, He always meant “written in the Old Testament”. Many Old Testament prophecies about the Jews were quoted in Chapter 2 of this book. Jesus was evidently referring to them, and others like them. He said that *all* of those things must be fulfilled.

If you refer back to Chapter 2 you will see that those prophecies about the Jews were in three groups: (1) Expulsion, (2) A long period of exile, (3) Return to their homeland. In the next verse but one, Jesus summarised all those Scriptures which “must be fulfilled”:

“And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations [that is (1), Expulsion] and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles [that is (2), A period of exile] *until* the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.”<sup>8</sup>

The key word “*until*” implies that the Gentiles would not always occupy Jerusalem. This was Christ’s way of referring to the third group of Old Testament prophecies, which spoke of the Jews eventually returning to their homeland. He spoke another two verses describing the state of the world at that future day, and then made a momentous promise:

“And *then* shall they see the Son of Man [Himself] coming in a cloud, with power and great glory.”<sup>9</sup>

In other words, Jesus taught that when the Jews went back to their homeland (and Jerusalem in particular) His Second Coming would soon follow.

This is how we know that Jesus was speaking of our day. For about 1800 years the Jews lived in exile. About seventy years ago they began to go home. In 1948 the State of Israel was set up. In 1967 Israel captured the Old City of Jerusalem (they already owned the New City). At last Jerusalem was no longer “trodden down of the Gentiles”.

Whether we agree with Israel’s policy of occupying Arab lands is beside the point. What matters is that Christ’s words unmistakably give us one vital piece of information. Recent events in the Holy Land have provided a sure sign that Christ’s return is near.

Do not be surprised if some other great changes have taken place in the land of Israel by the time you read these words. These are to be expected. For example, Ezekiel said that after God’s unworthy people had returned to their land, something miraculous would happen to convert them:

“I will gather you out of all countries and will bring you into your own land. *Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you and ye shall be clean;* from all your filthiness and from all your idols will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you.”<sup>10</sup>

How was the ungodly nation of Israel going to be changed so suddenly? Another prophet explains:

“I will save my people from the east country and from the west country, and I will bring them and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem . . . And I will pour upon the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem the spirit of grace and of supplication; and *they shall look upon me whom they have pierced,* and they shall mourn for him... And one shall say unto him, ‘What are these wounds in thine hands?’ Then he shall answer, ‘Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends’.”<sup>11</sup>

So that is how the unbelieving Israelis are to be converted so suddenly. Their Messiah will come to them. If you read the whole of Zechariah 12 you will see that he is to come to save them from a national disaster, which might even involve them in military defeat and a temporary captivity. This will be the most poignant moment in Israel’s 4,000-year history. They look at this Messiah who has just delivered them from their misery. They see he bears the marks of crucifixion. At long last the truth dawns upon them. and the Jews finally accept Jesus as their Messiah.

### **Meanwhile, in the World Outside...**

But this has been looking ahead. The return of Jesus is near, but it is still future. Our task at the moment is to see what Jesus says about our day, the time after the Jewish return to Jerusalem (reference 8, above) and before the Second Coming (reference 9). I left out the two verses separating those two passages. They said:

“And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men’s hearts failing them

for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth. For the powers of heaven shall be shaken.”<sup>12</sup>

Each phrase here is full of meaning. But it is no use looking at them with twentieth-century European eyes, and guessing at the meaning that seems likely to us. These words were spoken to first-century Jews, men steeped in Old Testament knowledge. We need to ask ourselves, “How would *they* have understood Christ’s words?” The answer undoubtedly is, “In the light of the Old Testament passages that Jesus was referring to.”

It is therefore necessary to examine each phrase in that light.

First, “Signs in the sun, moon and stars”. This language was a familiar Old Testament figure of speech for national disaster. Isaiah used it of the military conquest of Babylon<sup>13</sup> and Ezekiel of the military defeat of Egypt.<sup>14</sup> But it is the prophet Joel to whose words Jesus is most probably referring. Joel uses similar expressions twice:

once of the disaster coming upon Israel<sup>15</sup> and again of the disaster coming upon the whole world.<sup>16</sup> But in both chapters Joel is speaking of “the day of the Lord”, when Israel shall return to their land<sup>17</sup> and Messiah shall appear to establish God’s kingdom.<sup>18</sup>

Evidently by this expression Jesus was saying, “The great world disaster foretold by the Prophets will burst upon the world.”

His next phrase: “Upon the earth, distress of nations, with perplexity.” Again He refers to the Old Testament prophecies about His Second Coming, such as one in Daniel that says it would be accompanied by:

“A time of trouble such as never was, since there was a nation to that same time.”<sup>19</sup>

A standard authority on the Greek language<sup>20</sup> says that Christ’s word “perplexity” means, in the Greek New Testament, “a state of not knowing which way to turn”. This describes exactly the position of the world’s governments today. They know the problems threatening the human race with extinction. But they do not know which way to turn to solve them.

H. G. Wells spoke for many of his fellow unbelievers, when he wrote in his last book:

“This world is at the end of its tether. The end of everything we call life is close at hand and cannot be evaded - . - there is no way out, or round, or through the impasse. It is the end.”<sup>21</sup>

If he had not been an unbeliever, you might almost think that Wells was deliberately echoing Jesus - “not knowing which way to turn”.

The next words of Jesus are puzzling to many Western minds: “The sea and the waves roaring”. To the careful Bible reader they present no difficulty. Behind them lies the figurative language of Isaiah, who likened the behaviour of masses of wicked people to the raging of a restless sea.<sup>22</sup> If world catastrophe occurs, and law and order breaks down, it is not difficult to visualise the “roaring waves” of mob violence that will follow.

No wonder that Jesus continues, "Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth." It only needs one newspaper headline, such as, "American Ultimatum to Russia Expires at Midnight!" for those words to start coming true.

The verses quoted conclude, "for the powers of the heavens shall be shaken". This also is well-established Old Testament language, used to describe governments crashing under the impact of war.<sup>23</sup>

What does all this add up to? That Jesus foretold, in language that was perfectly clear to the Jews who first heard Him, and that can be equally clear to us if we trouble to get acquainted with the figures of speech used in the Old Testament, a world just like ours.

He said, in effect, that in the days when the Jews went back to the Land of Israel, the world would be facing frightful problems. World catastrophe would be looming up, but men would not know how to prevent it. When disaster came, governments would fall, law and order would go, mob violence would take its place. And then-thank God-He would return "to destroy them which destroy the earth" (to quote a phrase used in another New Testament book).<sup>24</sup>

How did Jesus manage to foretell so clearly the problem facing our world?  
This is the explanation He gave Himself:

"The word which ye hear is not Mine, but the Father's which sent me."<sup>25</sup>

Can you think of another explanation that fits the facts so well?

### **Peter Continues**

The right hand man of Jesus was His apostle, Peter. After Jesus left the scene, Peter became a leader of the Christian church. He wrote two books of the New Testament, and in one of them he enlarged on the Master's prophecy about our age. He said:

"In the last days *mockers shall come with mockery*) walking after their own lusts and saying, 'Where is the promise of His coming, for from the day that the fathers fell asleep *all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation*'. For this they wilfully forget, that by the Word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water, whereby *the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished*. But the heavens and the earth which are now, by the same Word, are kept in store *reserved unto fire* against the Day of Judgment - . The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and *the elements shall melt with fervent heat*".<sup>26</sup>

The words printed in italics show that Peter foresaw four distinct features about our age.

(1) *Men would mock at the idea of Christ's return*, They do mock, don't they? So much so that I had to appeal to you at the beginning of this chapter not to follow the fashion, but to give the facts a fair hearing.

(2) *Their excuse would be, "All things continue as they were."* In other words, "Natural laws carry on without changing; why should we believe that a Creator ever has intervened in the world's affairs, or will do so again?"

Only a scientist could be expected to recognise this as a remarkable prophecy. But it is. As Col. Merson Davies, a scientist of some distinction (he was awarded two doctorates for research in geology) has pointed Out, Peter's words exactly describe the modern scientific principle of "uniformitarianism" (or "uniformity", if you prefer short words to long ones).<sup>27</sup>

"Uniformity" is the foundation upon which the science of geology, and much else besides, is built. It leads directly to the popular philosophy, "Evolution has explained everything-therefore we needn't believe in God any more. Hooray!"

"Uniformity" is very much a modern invention. It was totally opposed to the thinking of the world in which Peter lived. Yet Peter foresaw its uprise, many centuries beforehand.

(3) *Men would deny that the Flood ever occurred.* This also was a most unlikely prophecy when it was written. Until a couple of hundred years ago the reality of Noah's Flood was never questioned. Yet today it is fashionable to regard it as a myth. Peter foresaw this complete change of thought, more than a thousand years before it began.

(4) *The final world catastrophe would be associated with fire.* This also is a surprising prophecy. The Old Testament which Peter knew so well generally associated the future world-wide catastrophe with war.<sup>26</sup> In Peter's day war was a matter of iron blades and flowing blood. How did he know that in our day the whole image of war would be different? First, firearms; then incendiary bombs; then napalm; finally, The Bomb. These have entirely changed the image of war. Now, more than anything else, we associate war with fire. How did Peter know that modern weapons would make "the elements melt with fervent heat"?

Once again the decision is up to you. This book can only put the facts before you. You are the one who must weigh them in your mind, and try to reach a decision.

Is there some other explanation for these facts?

Or did Jesus, and Peter, and the prophets of the Old Testament, really foresee the frightful predicament of our generation? And if so, can't we trust them as true prophets, and believe that God who foresaw our problems will solve them for us as He promised-by sending Jesus back to put the world right?

### ***Who Could Have Invented Jesus?***

Now we have left the evidence of fulfilled prophecy behind, and must go on to look at a very different kind of evidence. This will involve making a study of Jesus Christ Himself.

“Ah,” you may say, “but this begs the question. How do we know that there ever was such a person? What’s the use of *assuming* that the gospels tell the truth about Jesus, and then building conclusions on such a shaky foundation?”

Quite so. Very true. And I have no intention of doing any such thing. All I shall assume is that the gospels are either fact, or fiction, or a mixture of the two. (You won’t disagree with that, will you?) Then we shall examine the gospels critically to see which of those three alternatives seems most likely. Fair enough?

But before we begin, it is worth noting that even unbelievers generally recognise that the gospels are not pure fiction. One of the most learned of all unbelievers was Sir James Frazer. His classic history of magic and religion, *The Golden Bough*, was a landmark in twentieth century scholarship. He wrote:

“My theory assumes the historical reality of Jesus of Nazareth as a great religious and moral teacher [not, you will notice, as the Son of God] who founded Christianity and was crucified at Jerusalem under the governorship of Pontius Pilate. The testimony of the gospels, confirmed by the hostile evidence of Tacitus (Ann. 15,44) and the younger Pliny (Epist. 10,96) appears amply sufficient to establish these facts to the satisfaction of all unprejudiced enquirers. It is only the details of the life and death of Christ that remain, and will probably always remain, shrouded in the mists of uncertainty. *The doubts which have been cast upon the historical reality of Jesus are, in my judgment, unworthy of serious attention.* Quite apart from the positive evidence of history and tradition, the origin of a great religious and moral reform is inexplicable without the personal existence of a great reformer.”<sup>1</sup> (The italics are mine.)

### **Inventing the Uninventable**

About 500 years ago there lived in Italy one of the greatest geniuses of all time, Leonardo da Vinci. Besides painting some of the world’s greatest pictures, he was a research scientist of the first rank. He is often said to have “invented” the aeroplane, the steamship, and the submarine.

Perhaps “invented” is too strong a word, because he never built any such machines. He did, however, first hatch out the ideas that hundreds of years later led to the development of those modern marvels. So we can give him the benefit of the doubt and say that, in a sense, he did invent them.

His inventions were brilliant, but not impossible. All the background knowledge that he needed was to hand. But there were certain things that he did not invent, because in his day they were un-inventable. He could not invent a heart-lung machine, because he did not know about the circulation of the blood; more than a century was to elapse before Harvey discovered that. Nor could Leonardo invent an atom bomb, because he regarded matter as solid stuff; until modern scientists discovered that atoms were not solid lumps after all, but hollow spheres peppered with electric particles, the atom bomb was un-inventable.

Now the argument I shall put forward in this chapter is this: *the Jesus of whom we read in the gospels was, at the time the gospels were written, uninventable*. Consequently the Jesus of the gospels must have been a historical character, not a fictional one.

The first thing to note is that nobody wanted a person like the Jesus of the New Testament. (To avoid repetition I shall not keep saying "the Jesus of the New Testament" but simply "Jesus"-while, for the time being, leaving completely open the question whether He was a historical character or a fictitious one.) Paul summed up the situation when he wrote:

"But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Gentiles foolishness."<sup>2</sup>

Nearly all the Jews had no time for Him. They were bigots, completely set in their religious ways. This man turned all their religious ideas upside down. He was nothing like the conquering king of a Messiah that they wanted. No Jew would have wanted to invent such an improbable, unacceptable kind of Messiah.

Nearly all the Gentiles had no use for Him, either. He was altogether unlike the kind of men they admired. Theirs was a cruel, selfish, lustful world. Human life was cheap. They would leave unwanted babies (girls, usually) to die with as little compunction as we drown unwanted kittens.

Their pleasures were mostly immoral ones: watching gladiators fighting to the death, or worshipping at idolatrous temples which were often only glorified brothels. It is hard to imagine any Gentile inventing a Jesus whose teaching was so full of condemnation for the Gentile way of life.

Into this harsh world came Jesus, teaching things that made men marvel. He preached the necessity of unselfish love, love that stopped at nothing, love that led men to lay down their lives rather than use force against others. He preached it, and He set the example Himself. He refused to defend Himself, or even to let His disciples defend Him.<sup>3</sup> Instead, He went meekly to a horrible death.

We are not now concerned with the weighty question of whether Christians today should be pacifists. My personal opinion is in favour of Christian pacifism today, but that is beside the point. At the moment we are not concerned with opinions but with facts. The relevant facts are:

(1) That Jesus introduced to a hostile world the entirely new teaching of "Love to the uttermost".

(2) In keeping with this, He and His apostles preached pacifism.<sup>4</sup>

(3) He constantly lived up to His own teaching, even though it led Him to a cruel death.

(4) There is plenty of historical evidence that the early Christian Church followed His difficult teaching, including pacifism.<sup>5</sup>

It is not surprising that the originator of these unpopular teachings made few converts at first. In the very early days Christianity was a small sect "everywhere spoken against".<sup>6</sup> It was an unpopular minority religion.

True, by the fourth century it had grown great. But only because the standards had been lowered, the fine new teaching had been watered down. Yet even despite this watering down,

despite the wickedness that has been done in the name of Christ by millions of unworthy professors of Christianity—despite everything, the teaching of Jesus has met the world's need.

Where men have truly followed the teaching of the gospels, all that is best in the sad story of mankind has followed. Even unbelievers admit that. Here are the words of a famous American who did not believe that Jesus was the Son of God, Theodore Parker:

“Consider what a work his [Christ's] words and deeds have wrought in the world. Remember that the greatest minds, the richest hearts, have set no loftier aim, no truer method than his of perfect love to God and man. Shall we be told that such a man never lived—the whole story is a lie! Suppose that Plato and Newton never lived. But who did their wonders, and thought their thought? It takes a Newton to forge a Newton. What man could have fabricated a Jesus?”<sup>7</sup>

Besides paying tribute to all that the Christian message has done for mankind, Parker takes up the question with which we began: could anyone have invented Jesus? And although he regarded Jesus as a mere man, he answered with a resounding, “No!”

Another famous writer who was a complete unbeliever, John Stuart Mill, backs him up:

“It is of no use to say that Christ as exhibited in the gospels is not historical, and that we know not how much of what is admirable has been superadded by the tradition of his followers. Who among his disciples or among their proselytes was capable of inventing the sayings ascribed to Jesus, or of imagining the life and character revealed in the gospels? Certainly not the fishermen of Galilee, still less the early Christian writers.”<sup>8</sup>

### **His Sublime character**

So far so good. The idea that any lesser men could have “invented” Jesus begins to look unlikely. But the evidence is not yet conclusive. We must go a little further, and study more closely the character of this Jesus.

To save space, we shall only be able to consider the last twenty-four hours of His life. As we do this, it is important that you bear two things in mind:

(1) We shall be dodging about between all four gospels, because this is the only way we can build up a complete picture of Him. So, if Jesus was invented”, He had not one inventor but four, all skilfully co-operating to produce a realistic result.

(2) Many of the facets of His character that we shall examine are not on the surface of the record. We have to look very carefully, to dig them out from where they lie, half-buried in the text. Does this look like fiction, or fact? Novelists do not usually hide all their best points, so that only a diligent student can find them!

We enter the gospel story on the evening before He is crucified. He is in an upstairs room with the twelve apostles, where they are about to have supper. He knows that this will be the last meal of His mortal life, and He intends to make it a memorable one. Two passages summarise one aspect of this meal:

“When Jesus knew that His hour was come . . . having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end.”<sup>9</sup>

“And He said unto them, ‘With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer’ ... And He took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, ‘This is My body which is given for you; this do in remembrance of Me.’ Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.’”<sup>10</sup>

From these two passages, we can deduce:

(1) That He knew what was coming to Him. He had often said that one day He would be crucified,<sup>11</sup> and now the time had arrived.

(2) Nevertheless, He was not thinking of the frightful pain that would soon be racking His own body. His only concern was love for His disciples: “He loved them unto the end.”

(3) By comparing similar expressions in the Old Testament, we can see that “with desire I have desired” is a Jewish way of saying, “with a very intense desire”. For their sakes He was terribly keen to hold that ceremonial meal with them.

(4) He turned that meal into a dramatised parable. He broke bread, and used it to represent the next day’s tearing of His own flesh. He poured wine, and made it a symbol of His blood that would soon be flowing from a multitude of wounds.

Any other man would have wanted to forget about the torture that was coming to him tomorrow. But Jesus was prepared to bring it vividly to mind. Although it was so painful to Himself, He knew that this simple ceremony would benefit His disciples for centuries to come. And so He performed it with eager desire.

A further group of verses shows up another aspect of that meal:

“He poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith He was girded... So after He had washed their feet, and had taken His garments, and was set down again, He said unto them, ‘Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord, and ye say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another’s feet.’”<sup>12</sup>

“And as they did eat, He said, ‘Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray Me.’ And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one to say unto Him, ‘Lord, is it I?’”<sup>13</sup>

One aspect of His character lies right on the surface here. He was an exceedingly humble man. He was willing to do a very tiring and unpleasant job. But why did He do it? Couldn’t they all wash their own feet?

He was not the sort of man to show off. Nor was He doing an unnecessary chore just so that He could give them a lecture about helping one another. There was a very good reason for His action, but it takes a careful student of the gospels to discover it.

We learn the reason from another gospel. Soon after supper the disciples found themselves unable to stay awake.<sup>14</sup> Evidently they were all utterly weary with overwork and lack of sleep. So the Master’s work upon their tired feet was a real and necessary act of loving kindness.

But there is yet another lesson lying under the surface. It lies behind that chorus of astonishment, “Is it I?” which rose up when He said, “One of you shall betray Me.”

Obviously they had not the slightest idea who the traitor was. But Jesus knew. John says so, explicitly.<sup>15</sup> A few minutes before, Jesus had washed the feet of Judas. And *He must have washed the traitor’s feet with the same loving care that He bestowed upon the other eleven.*

Otherwise someone would have noticed, and said, "Have you seen how the Master is looking at Judas? I wonder what's wrong."

But nobody noticed any difference-hence that repeated question, "Is it I?"

What superhuman love, if these records really are true and Jesus really did behave like that!

But what superhuman artistry if Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were four deceivers, weaving together the most elaborately hidden pen portrait in the history of fiction!

## Gethsemane

Supper is over. Judas Iscariot has gone off alone to earn his blood money. Jesus and the faithful eleven go out into the darkness of the Garden of Gethsemane. In one part of the garden the disciples drop to the earth exhausted, and sleep.

In another part, Jesus begins His last great struggle against His mortal body.

"He kneeled down, and prayed, saying 'Father if Thou be willing, remove this cup from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Thine, be done.' And there appeared an angel unto Him from heaven, strengthening Him. And being in an agony He prayed more earnestly, and His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground."<sup>16</sup>

This does not read like fiction. No gospel writer would want to invent an incident like that. Inventors of propaganda might have told a tale about Jesus facing death with unruffled calm. But the gospel writers were not inventors of propaganda. They record how the Son of God admitted that one side of Him would have liked to escape crucifixion. They portray Him as fighting a terrific battle to overcome His human desire-a battle so great that He was in agony, while the sweat poured off Him like blood.

How easily this story could have been (yes, and has been) misinterpreted by the immature as something unworthy of the Son of God. But the apostles wrote it just the same. They wrote with the candour of men who have nothing to hide, who are only concerned to record the plain, unvarnished facts.

No sooner has Jesus won His battle than lights appear, coming through the olive trees towards His little band. They hear the clink of steel, and the tramp of many men. Unless something is done quickly there will be twelve arrests instead of one, and eleven extra crosses on Calvary tomorrow.

The next act of Jesus always reminds me of Captain Oates of the Antarctic, who said goodbye to his friends and walked off into the blizzard to die, hoping that through his sacrifice they might survive. "It was the act of a brave man and an English gentleman," wrote Captain Scott in his diary.

When Scott's diary was found, he and his fellows were all dead. Yet everybody takes it for granted that Scott was telling the truth. His account bears all the marks of a true record. And similarly John's gospel reads like sober fact, not glamourised fiction.

"Jesus therefore, knowing all things that should come upon Him, went forth and said unto them, 'Whom seek ye?' They answered Him, 'Jesus of Nazareth.' Jesus saith unto them, 'I am He.' And Judas also, which betrayed Him, stood with them. As soon then as He had said unto

them, 'I am He,' they went backward, and fell to the ground. Then asked He them again, 'Whom seek ye?' And they said, 'Jesus of Nazareth.' Jesus answered, 'I have told you that I am He: if therefore ye seek Me, let these go their way.'"<sup>17</sup>

But what lies behind that strange statement in the middle of the passage, "they went backward and fell to the ground"? The reader inevitably wonders what made a strong force of armed men do that. If John had been writing fiction, would he have left that question unanswered? Surely not. By stating the fact, and leaving us to draw our own conclusions, John shows that he is no embroiderer of fancy tales.

As so often happens, another book of the Bible supplies the probable explanation for us. When Christ's first martyr, Stephen, was in a somewhat similar position, his executioners "saw his face as it had been the face of an angel"<sup>18</sup>. If the face of Jesus similarly shone with angelic glory for a moment, it is not surprising that His enemies staggered backwards in terror.

### **To the Cross**

So the innocent man was led away, to be sentenced on a trumped-up charge with the aid of bribed witnesses. Yet He would not argue in His own defence.<sup>19</sup> When He spoke it was for the sake of others.

He even showed a measure of sympathy for Pilate, to whom He said: "Thou couldest have no power at all against Me, except it were given thee from above. Therefore he that delivered Me unto thee hath the greater sin."<sup>20</sup>

With the rough heavy cross upon His shoulder, He struggled along the road to Calvary. Even then, His thoughts were upon others rather than Himself.

"And there followed Him a great company of people, and of women, which also bewailed and lamented Him. But Jesus turning unto them said, 'Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for Me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children. For, behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say, "Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the breasts which never gave suck."<sup>21</sup>

It was to be thirty-odd years before the Roman armies came to destroy Jerusalem. But to Jesus, that dreadful day to come was even more tragic than His own immediate plight.

Even while He hung on the cross, in His final awful pain, He could still help others.

He cried with a loud voice, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?"<sup>22</sup> Though at first sight this looks like weakness or despair it was nothing of the kind. Those words are actually the first line of Psalm 22, which, as we saw in Chapter 4' is a wonderfully detailed prophecy of the events on that dreadful day. By reciting this title-line of a well-known Jewish hymn, Jesus was as good as saying, "Look everybody! See how Messianic prophecy is being fulfilled today. See, and believe!"

He prayed for His executioners to be forgiven, because they did not understand the enormity of their offence.<sup>23</sup>

He arranged for a faithful disciple to take care of His heartbroken mother.<sup>24</sup>

He comforted the dying thief who had come to believe in Him at the eleventh hour.<sup>25</sup>

When there was nothing else left for Him to do, He gave a shout of triumph—"It is finished!"<sup>26</sup>  
Then, with quiet dignity, He died:

"He said, 'Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit.' And having said thus, He gave up the ghost."<sup>27</sup>

We have not been able to look at more than a fraction of the gospel records of the crucifixion. But what we have seen is a picture of a man like no other man, a man that no first-century legend-spinner could possibly have invented. No wonder that the centurion who watched it all said, "Truly, this man *was* the Son of God!"<sup>28</sup>

### **Did the Gospel Writers Exaggerate?**

We have disposed of one possibility. The gospels are not pure fiction. But there is that other possibility, that they might be a mixture of fact and fiction. Could the gospel writers have described an "ordinary" good man, and then added all sorts of imaginary sayings and events, just as a modern writer might write a novel about Napoleon or Julius Caesar?

This suggestion also runs against the facts. Here are four solid reasons for believing that the gospels are all fact, not a mixture of fact and fiction.

(1) *The gospel writers sound like reliable men.* You will need to read all four gospels for yourself to appreciate that this is so. Then you will see that these books were obviously not written by men out to create a sensation. They each tell their tale in a simple, straightforward way. Where it is appropriate they point out how Old Testament prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus. Apart from this, they write like men reporting facts, not like men determined to impress their readers.

They are not afraid to mention things that, to a casual reader, may seem unfavourable to their cause. They report some surprising acts and sayings of Jesus which, at first glance, seem to show Him in an unfavourable light. We have to study these passages very closely, often by comparing one gospel with another, before we can see that Jesus did in fact have good reason for everything He said and did. (We have seen several examples of this already in this chapter.)

Again, they are not at all like four dishonest witnesses determined to present a united front. Each tells his story from his own point of view, regardless of what the others have said. Sometimes it even *looks* as if they contradict each other. Only when you study the records closely can you see that there is real harmony behind the apparent contradictions, as Chapter 19 shows.

All these things are the marks of honest men, telling a true story.

(2) *Their stories hang together as a whole.* If the gospels are a mixture of fact and fiction, then which bits are the factual bits? Hundreds of unbelievers and half-believers have tried to answer this question to their own satisfaction.

But no two have ever reached exactly the same conclusion. They have been attempting the impossible. It can't be done. The gospels do not read like a patchwork album. They read like a

consistent, unified record. (If you should think that modern scholars have shown that the gospels are in fact a patchwork album, please reserve your judgment until you have read Part Two of this book.)

Our character study showed that the Jesus of the gospels had a character far above that of any other man. Take away all the passages that indicate a superhuman character for Jesus, and there is very little left. The four gospels are absolutely consistent in their message that Jesus was a uniquely righteous person; consequently, it makes sense to accept that He was.

Once you grant this, everything else in the gospels follows naturally. Despite His quiet humility He had a serene confidence that He was sinless, that He was Messiah, that He was Son of God. All this ties up with His perfect character; it is what we might have expected.

So are the stories of His miracles. The very presence of the Son of God on earth was itself a miracle. Nothing could be more natural than that He should work some miracles for the good of mankind while He was here.

If you have an old, worn-out Bible to spare, try this little experiment. Blot out all the miracles from your four gospels, and see what is left. You will find that the remaining fragments often fail to make sense. This clearly shows that the miracle stories are not something added as an afterthought, but are an integral part of the original record.

(Please don't shut your mind to these facts because some people argue that it is unscientific to believe in miracles. We shall be looking at miracles from a scientific viewpoint in Chapter 21.)

(3) *They did not keep on writing.* These four books are the best sellers of all the world's literature. Yet they are extremely brief. They occupy only twenty or thirty pages each, in the average printed Bible. No other writings by Matthew or Mark are known, and only about another thirty pages by Luke and twenty by John.

If their writing were the product of their own genius, why didn't they keep on writing? Creative geniuses cannot bear to stop after one short outburst. But since the gospel writers did stop so soon, they were evidently not men of genius eager to express themselves in creative work. Nor could they have been spurred on by the desire for fame.

Some unbelievers suggest that they did keep on writing, but that their other works were not preserved. But this only creates another problem: why did their readers not bother to keep the other works of these brilliant authors? Hundreds of pages of the writings of less gifted Jews and Greeks of that period have survived, but only a handful of pages by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Why?

If we regard these men as mere literary geniuses the problem is insoluble. Bestseller writers have seldom or never been known to burst into full flower with one brief work of superb artistry, and then stop. If only one gospel writer had done so, we might perhaps explain it as a remarkable exception to the general rule. But since two have done it, and the other two have added only a few more pages by way of sequel,<sup>29</sup> we need some better explanation.

There is only one explanation that makes psychological sense. They must have been single-minded men with one purpose: to set down a few facts of tremendous importance. They told their tale briefly and accurately-and then stopped.

(4) *They do not tell us what Jesus looked like.* Fiction writers almost always give us some sort of picture of their great heroes. If Matthew, Mark, Luke and John really were adding fiction to fact, surely one of them would have dropped some hint about the appearance of Jesus. Yet none of them gives us a clue.

We have no idea whether He was short or tall, fat or thin, dark or fair, handsome or ugly. Why not? There is one obvious explanation which fits the facts. God said to an Old Testament prophet:

“The Lord seeth not as man seeth, for man looketh on the Outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.”<sup>30</sup>

The evidence before us suggests that Jesus really was the Son of God. How very fitting that God should guide the pens of the four men who described His Son, to ensure that they gave us a perfect picture of His “heart”, but not the slightest idea of His “outward appearance”.

### ***The Evidence of the Empty Tomb***

Before you read this chapter, let me give you a friendly warning.

If you are an unbeliever and want to remain one, don't read this chapter. Or, if you do read it, forget it as quickly as possible. Don't think about it. Whatever you do, don't follow it up by studying in detail the evidence that Jesus rose from the dead.

I say this because experience shows that it is a very perilous thing for unbelievers to do. Take two actual case histories, one ancient, one modern.

Two upper-class Englishmen of the eighteenth century were Lord Lyttleton and his friend Gilbert West. They were both trained lawyers. They knew how to weigh evidence and how to argue a case.

As young men they were both unbelievers. It is said that in their early days they had hopes of publishing propaganda *against* the truth of Christianity. At any rate, it is known that they both set their agnostic minds to work studying the evidence for and against Christ's resurrection.

The same thing happened to them both. Despite their early antagonism to the Bible, despite their deepest prejudices, the sheer weight of evidence made them change their minds. West and Lyttleton published the results of their separate studies in a joint book.<sup>1</sup> They argued that Christ really did rise from the dead, and that Paul was converted in consequence.

If I mention this to Norman, he brushes it on one side with the remark, "Oh yes, but that was all a long time ago." This is a curious objection. Shakespeare was a long time ago, but his plays are still worth more than all the paperbacks on the station bookstall. The facts that Lyttleton and West faced are just as formidable in the twentieth century as in the eighteenth, as the following story shows.

In 1930 Frank Morrison published a very unusual book.<sup>2</sup> In his preface he stated:

"It [his book] is essentially a confession, the inner story of a man who set Out to write one kind of book and found himself compelled by the sheer force of circumstances to write another."

He explained what he meant in the first chapter, which was entitled, "The Book that Refused to be Written". When he set out to write a book he did not believe that Jesus performed miracles, nor that He rose from the dead. His book was intended to be called, "Jesus, the Last Phase". It was to be a study of the last week of Christ's life. He intended to sift out the "fiction" from the gospel records, and report what was left.

So Morrison sat down to do his homework. He made a very thorough and scholarly study of all the available evidence. At the end of it all he wrote a very different book, which with irresistible logic leads up to a final paragraph:

"There may be, and, as the writer thinks, there certainly is, a deep and profoundly historical basis for that much disputed sentence in the Apostles' Creed-'The third day He rose again from the dead.'"

In other words, Morrison declared, "Having studied the evidence, I now believe what I formerly denied: Jesus really did rise from the dead."

### **How Do We Know?**

Well, what is the nature of this evidence that convinces so many people? How can anyone possibly know whether Jesus rose from the dead or not?

There are several ways of tackling this question. One way is to begin with the broader question of what constitutes historical evidence.

How do we know any of the facts of history? For example, how do we know that the American War of Independence began in 1775 with the Battle of Bunker Hill, and that although the English won the battle the losses they suffered were disastrous?

Nobody doubts these facts, although all the people who saw the battle have been dead for more than a hundred years. We rely upon the written accounts left behind by a few of those eyewitnesses.

It is like that with the resurrection of Jesus. Four gospel writers give us a written account of it. Two of them were eyewitnesses, the others were intimate friends of eyewitnesses. Two more eyewitnesses, Peter and Paul, add their testimony in their New Testament epistles.

Don't make the mistake of looking upon the New Testament as "just a lot of books". It was the product of a group of real, live men. We saw in the previous chapter that it is difficult to read the gospels without concluding that Jesus was a real person, with real disciples, who wrote the truth about Him.

We shall see in Chapter 16 that most of the New Testament was almost undoubtedly written while people who remembered Jesus were still alive. Its authors were certainly not men of the second century writing down legends. They were men of the first century writing about their own experiences.

We must therefore treat the New Testament as the written testimony of a number of witnesses. The only question is: were those witnesses telling the truth or not?

Before attempting to answer that question, we must consider a parallel question from modern history. How do we know that Sir Edmund Hillary and the Sherpa, Tensing, conquered Mount Everest in 1953?

There were no independent witnesses of their achievement, and Hillary and Tensing might be regarded as two very biased men. Yet nobody doubts the truth of their claim to have reached the summit.

Is it possible that Hillary and Tensing were bluffing? Could they have been beaten by the last stretch of ice and rock, and then decided to cover up their disappointment with a false tale of victory and a faked photograph?

Surely not. Mountain climbers have a very strong code of honour, and it goes against all past experience to suppose that two dedicated mountaineers would behave like that.

Well, then, is it possible that they were genuinely mistaken? Could the awesome majesty of their surroundings, or the bottled oxygen they were breathing, have given them hallucinations and made them think that some lesser needle of rock was the summit?

This possibility, too, must be dismissed. These two hardened men of action were not the type to make a hysterical blunder like that.

So the world takes their word for it, and firmly believes that they really did reach the top.

### **Reliable Witnesses**

There are equally good grounds for accepting the apostles' word and believing that Jesus really did rise from the dead.

Were Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Peter and Paul all deliberately lying?

Of course not. Men only lie when they stand to gain something from it. What did the apostles gain from their testimony to the resurrection? Imprisonment, torture and death! Men do not lie for rewards such as these. And besides, the lofty moral tone of their New Testament writings shows that they were men of high principles.

What, then, of the possibility that they were genuinely mistaken? Could they have been the victims of a great delusion?

This suggestion goes right against the facts. On their own admission the apostles all had a marked prejudice against the idea of Christ's resurrection. It took time to overcome this prejudice and convince them that Jesus really had risen.

Wishful thinking might have led Mary Magdalene to mistake the gardener for Jesus, if she had been expecting Him to rise from the dead. But the record says that the opposite happened-she mistook the resurrected Jesus for the gardener.<sup>3</sup>

Wishful thinking might have led the two disciples travelling to Emmaus to mistake a stranger for Jesus, if they had wanted to believe in His resurrection. Instead of that, they mistook the resurrected Jesus for a stranger.<sup>4</sup>

When He appeared to His sorrowing apostles, even they thought He was a phantom-until they were invited to touch Him, putting their hands into the wound in His side, and their fingers into the holes where the nails had fastened Him to the cross.<sup>5</sup>

They thought they were imagining His presence-until He joined them in a meal, and they saw food disappearing into His mouth.<sup>6</sup> He spent many, many hours with them, enlarging their understanding of the Old Testament Scriptures.<sup>7</sup> And finally they all watched Him ascend into heaven.<sup>8</sup>

No, all the evidence suggests that we must treat these contemporaries of Jesus with the same respect as Hillary and Tensing. We have no reason to suspect them of lying. There are no grounds for thinking of them as poor, deluded simpletons.

There is only one view of them that fits the facts. They were honest, intelligent men, reporting a very wonderful event.

## Cause and Effect

In Chapter 2 we noted a fundamental law of science, that nothing ever happens without a cause. In Chapter 6 we saw how Christianity came into existence in a most unfavourable environment.

Now these are two facts that simply cannot be denied. Even if you are not yet convinced that Jesus rose from the dead, you cannot reasonably disagree with the statements in the previous paragraph.

Put those two statements together, and immediately a question arises. What was the cause that gave birth to Christianity? Whatever that cause was it must have been something tremendous, judging by the results it achieved.

Remember, as Chapter 6 showed, what an unpopular religion Christianity was, among both Jews and Gentiles. Nevertheless quite a few Jews and Gentiles did accept it. And those few accepted it with such tremendous vigour that they changed the face of the world.

The unbelieving Jews accused the early Christian Jews of having “turned the world upside down”.<sup>9</sup> And from a Jewish point of view, they had. The Jewish religion was the oldest, strictest, narrowest, most self-confident religion on earth. It was a religion first given to their fathers by God Himself, and how they prided themselves on that fact!

True, they were not a united body. They had their various sects and schools of thought. But on certain things they were all agreed. These were such vital parts of the Jewish religion, and had been unchanged for so many centuries, that they clung fanatically to them. Their basic dogmas included:

- (1) The belief that there was only one God. In a world where every other nation worshipped many gods, this was the great distinguishing mark of the Jewish faith.
- (2) A superior attitude to the Gentiles. The God that the Jews believed in had no interest in the Gentiles, unless they were prepared to adopt the Jewish religion and way of life completely.
- (3) A fanatical insistence on keeping the Sabbath Day (Saturday) as a day of complete rest from work and a day of worship.
- (4) A determination not to eat those foods (such as pork) that were forbidden by the Law of Moses.
- (5) A deep hatred of human sacrifice.

From among this ultra-conservative people sprang the leaders of a new faith. They were not irreligious men. They were men of the very highest moral principles. Yet their teaching cut right across the cherished dogmas of the Jews.

The Christians claimed that they still believed in only one God. But most Jews regarded that claim as absurd. How could these Christians say they had only one God, when their Lord Jesus was supposed to be sitting in heaven at God's right hand? To the orthodox Jew, such a doctrine was blasphemous nonsense; it reminded them of the deified heroes that the pagans believed in.

Then there was that question of sacrifice. To the devout Jew, sacrifice could mean only one thing. A priest would slay an animal in the temple at Jerusalem, and offer it to God in the way

that Moses had prescribed. These Christians had the audacity to say that Jesus Christ, who was executed as a criminal, was really a human sacrifice for sins. "Disgusting!" said the Jews.

To the orthodox Jews the practices of the early Christians were as evil as their beliefs. They admitted Gentiles to full membership of their Church, without first making Jews of them. They dropped the Sabbath, and worshipped God on Sunday instead. They allowed people to eat whatever food they fancied.

But despite all these objections a fair sprinkling of Jews, including quite a number of priests,<sup>10</sup> did join the early Church. What happened to cause this? What shook these people out of their deep-seated prejudices, based on a thousand years of national pride and tradition?

To produce such a staggering result, something extraordinary must have happened. What could it have been? The New Testament provides an answer. It says that Peter stood up in Jerusalem and proved that Jesus had risen from the dead; in consequence 3,000 Jerusalemites were baptised.<sup>11</sup>

The New Testament's explanation fits the facts beautifully. A tremendous Act of God like the resurrection of Jesus, if clearly established, could well have overcome the prejudices of so many devout Jews. It is hard to imagine what else could have produced such a dramatic result.

One Jew to be converted was called Paul. Nowadays no one seriously doubts that he was a real historical character, who wrote at least some of the New Testament books bearing his name. He was a brilliant man, with a phenomenal understanding of the Old Testament. (Just study his epistles if you have any doubt about that.)

Full of zeal for the orthodox Jewish position, he began life as a persecutor of the Christian Church. Yet he changed abruptly, to become the most effective of all Christian preachers, and ended his days as a martyr for Christ.

What changed him? Let him explain in his own words:

"If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain and your faith is also vain.... But now *is* Christ risen from the dead.... He was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve; after that He was seen of above five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain unto this present . . . After that He was seen of James, then of all the apostles. And last of all, *He was seen of me also*, as of one born out of due time."<sup>12</sup>

On two occasions he explained at length how he met the resurrected Jesus on the road to Damascus.<sup>13</sup> It was this that changed the course of his life, he said.

Either this was true, and Christ did rise from the dead. Or it was false, and we are left with a fact without an explanation. For how else can we account for Paul's conversion, or for the epistles that he wrote?

### **The Tomb was Empty**

One thing is quite certain. The tomb in which the body of Jesus was buried was empty three days later. The dead body of Jesus was never seen again. If an unbeliever wants to dispute the resurrection story, he must take that fact as his starting point.

How can we be sure of this? Because it is obvious. The Jewish leaders who crucified Jesus would have loved to be able to say, "Look, this is the tomb, and here is the body-as dead as ever!" Had they done so, Christianity would never have been born.

But they were powerless. The tomb was empty, and so they could not disprove the resurrection story. They could only make the best of a bad job, and try to explain the emptiness of the tomb.

They put their wily heads together, and concocted the very best story they could. Matthew tells us:

"They gave large money unto the soldiers [that is, the soldiers who had been guarding the tomb] saying, 'Say ye, "His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we slept."'.. And this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day."<sup>14</sup>

Matthew's statement is confirmed by two later writers. Both Justin Martyr<sup>15</sup> and Tertullian<sup>16</sup> were still meeting the same explanation from unbelieving Jews in the second half of the second century.

The unbelievers' favourite approach today is not to offer any explanation of the facts. They prefer to dodge the main issue completely, by raising all sorts of side issues: "But how do we know that our gospels are what the apostles wrote? How do we know that changes weren't made in later years? Don't the gospel writers contradict each other?"

All such questions are beside the point. They merely evade the main evidence for Christ's resurrection, which is based upon the unassailable facts of history. And in any case, these questions are dealt with in Part Two of this book.

The "Theft Theory" was the very best that the men on the spot, the unbelieving Jews, could produce. It stands to reason that, after this lapse of time, no modern unbeliever is likely to produce a better theory. And yet such is human nature that various modern unbelievers have tried.

They have only managed to find three alternatives worth serious consideration. First, there is the "Wrong Tomb Theory". According to this, the disciples looking for the body in the grey light of dawn blundered into some other tomb. It happened to be an empty one. "He is risen!" they cried impetuously-and convinced the world that they were right.

Then there is the "Recovery Theory". This suggests that the bleeding body of Jesus was not quite dead when they took it down from the cross, buried it, and partially embalmed it. Then the severely wounded Jesus recovered consciousness. He managed to free Himself from the embalming cloths, break the seal on the great stone that closed the mouth of the tomb, roll its vast mass to one side, and creep past the guards unobserved.

But this tall story is not finished yet. It goes on to declare that the half-dead Jesus appeared to His disciples and managed to persuade them that He had been raised to splendid, glorious, all-powerful immortality. Then He managed to disappear for ever from the scene, so that none of them saw Him die.

Believe it or not, this improbable tale has been put forward by unbelievers time after time. Surely they must be in a bad way, if they can be satisfied with a theory like that.

Finally, there is the "Hallucination Theory". This says that disciples gathered together for a meeting, and in a religious frenzy they all imagined that the risen Lord appeared to them.

Two of these four theories can be dismissed without a second thought. The "Wrong Tomb" and "Hallucination" theories suffer from the fatal objection that the Jews would certainly have produced the dead body of Jesus, and blown Christianity to bits.

The "Recovery Theory" is so obviously far fetched that we are back at our starting point: the Jewish "Theft Theory" is the best of a bad lot. It is the only explanation worthy of further consideration.

Yet it still does not explain half the facts. It presupposes that the apostles were a bunch of brazen cheats. But they were obviously neither brazen nor cheats. They were thoroughly frightened men. On their own admission, when Jesus died they all forsook Him and fled<sup>17</sup> and lost faith in His Messiahship.<sup>18</sup>

And they were good men. Cheats do not write sublime religious literature like the New Testament, nor suffer martyrdom cheerfully for the sake of their faith. But worst of all, like all the unbelievers' theories, it does not begin to answer the great question that unbelievers refuse to face:

What caused the sudden uprise of Christianity in an utterly hostile world? What caused a little band of devout, working-class Jews to overcome their deep-rooted religious prejudices; to challenge the religious leaders of their nation; to lay down their lives preaching an incredibly novel and unpopular faith?

It was the most extraordinary, unlikely occurrence in all history. What caused it?

Only one explanation fits the facts.

There is no need for me to tell you what that explanation is.

### ***A Law Ahead of its Time***

Imagine one of those programmes where a man in a busy street with a microphone and a television camera stops passers by.

“Excuse me, Sir, (or, Madam). I wonder if you can tell me who first spoke these words: ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself?’”

Leaving out the “Don’t know” and the “Don’t care” brigade, it is a fair bet that most people will answer, “Why, Jesus, of course!”

But they would be wrong. Those words first appear in the book of Leviticus,<sup>1</sup> near the beginning of the Old Testament. All Jesus did was to remind people of their importance.

The first five books of the Bible-Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy-contain the code of laws under which the children of Israel lived. Together they are called “The Law of Moses”, or simply “The Law”.

“Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” illustrates how far the Law was ahead of its time. Jesus is regarded as a very advanced moral teacher, and, of course, He was. Yet one of His most famous sayings was a quotation from the Law of Moses.

There is no need to spend much time discussing the Ten Commandments. No other document in the world has had so much influence on the legal and moral codes that civilised man lives by. Other men in the ancient world, like the famous Hammurabi, drew up their own codes of law. Yet none of these has had the lasting effect of the Ten Commandments.

But at the moment I am more concerned with the Law of Moses as a law of love. Men think of it as a stern, strong law, and it was so. It had to be, in that far-off lawless age. But in many ways it was also a tender, merciful law. And considering the age in which it was written, that is little short of a miracle.

A little over a hundred years ago, a famous cartoon appeared in an English journal. It bore the following caption:

“Who’s ‘im, Bill?”

“A stranger!”

“‘Eave ‘arf a brick at ‘im.”<sup>2</sup>

This typifies the attitude of men to strangers all through history. Now contrast what Moses said:

“The stranger that dwelleth with you shall be as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself, for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.”<sup>3</sup>

Not only your neighbour, but you must also love the foreigner as yourself! Here Moses was not only ahead of *his* time, but ahead of *our* time, too. Think how much racial strife would be avoided in the world today, if men would only do as Moses commanded.

The Law was concerned with little things as well as big. Think of all the mental suffering that has been caused by malicious, gossiping tongues. The Law clamped down on this:

“Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people.”<sup>4</sup>

Among the other ancient nations there was no end to man's cruelty to his fellow men. Only among the Jews was cruelty kept in check. There was no death by prolonged torture in Israel. The only forms of capital punishment prescribed by the Law of Moses led to a quick death.

The Law also set a limit to the extent of corporal punishment. Other nations would flog criminals indefinitely, until often they died beneath the lash. But Moses said that forty strokes must be the maximum.<sup>5</sup> The Law even ruled against cruelty to animals.<sup>6</sup>

All through history the moneylender has been the curse of primitive societies. Even today, in many underdeveloped countries starving peasants spend their whole lives in debt, while the moneylenders grow rich from disgracefully high rates of interest. Many Jews are among those who have made fortunes from moneylending. But they would not have been if they had appreciated the spirit of their Law.

For the Law set an example to all mankind by frowning on this practice. Israelites were allowed (though not encouraged) to take interest from foreigners. But three different books forbade Israelites to charge one another interest.<sup>7</sup> At the same time Moses insisted that, if a poor citizen needed an interest-free loan or a gift, he must be given it.<sup>8</sup> Although the lender was allowed to ask for the borrower's coat as security for a loan, he must not keep it after sundown if the owner needed it for warmth.<sup>9</sup>

## Pure Worship

When Israel first became a nation, the religions of their neighbours were indescribably vile. The world was full of idols, in whose name the foulest deeds were done. Human sacrifice, black magic, ritual prostitution, witchcraft—there was no end to the evils perpetrated under the guise of religion.

Now and again some outstanding man—such as King Amenhotep IV, who ruled Egypt during the fourteenth century B.C.—would try to reform his country's religion. But none of them had any lasting influence on mankind. There was only one nation whose Law shone like a beacon in a dark world:

“I am the Lord thy God.... Thou shalt have none other gods beside Me.”<sup>10</sup>

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord, and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.”<sup>11</sup>

There was only one God, not a thousand and one. Because of that, a man must be single-minded in his devotion to that One God. The idols of the other nations were as nothing; therefore they must not have the slightest influence upon a man's thoughts or deeds.

“Thou shalt not learn to do after the abominations of those nations. There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, or a charmer, or a consulter

with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer. For all that do these things are an abomination unto the Lord.”<sup>12</sup>

Right up to the time of Christ there was not another nation that had followed Moses' example, and banned all these hideous religious practices of the ancient world.

## Health is Wealth

“What's he got that I haven't got?” is a common human complaint. One reason for the Jews' unpopularity is that men have often had cause to be jealous of them.

Professor Rendle Short, who was a surgeon as well as a Bible student, gives an interesting example from fourteenth-century Italy.<sup>13</sup> Plague was sweeping the country, and the Italians noticed that the Jewish communities escaped much more lightly than themselves. They guessed, correctly, that the Jewish Law had something to do with it. So they adopted the Jewish system, and their death rate fell.

As a twentieth-century Italian doctor has written in an ordinary medical textbook:

“No-one can fail to be impressed by the careful hygienic precautions of the Mosaic period. The extremely stringent quarantine rules very likely did a great deal of good.”<sup>14</sup>

Here are some of the provisions of the Law that helped to keep Israel healthy.

(1) *Isolation*. “Lepers” (the Biblical term includes a whole group of infectious diseases, along with the modern leprosy) were commanded to live separately from the rest of the people.<sup>15</sup> The modern practice of isolating sufferers from infectious diseases was derived directly from the Jews.

(2) *Washing after handling dead bodies*. When a Jew had handled a dead body he was regarded as “unclean”. He was to be quarantined for seven days, and to undergo an elaborate washing procedure before he was regarded as fit to mix with society again.<sup>16</sup> Until about a hundred years ago surgeons used to handle the dead and the dying, and then go straight into the operating theatre without washing. Thousands of their patients died through infection. Many of them might have lived if those early surgeons had kept the Law of Moses.

(3) *Sanitation*. In 1969 I walked along the main street of a large African city and watched human excrement drifting along the open drains at the sides of the road. I reflected on the high incidence of disease in that city, and the low expectation of life. And then I wondered how much better off the people would be if only they obeyed the Law of Moses:

“You must have a latrine outside the camp and go outside to it; you must carry a spade among your weapons, and when you relieve yourself outside, you must dig a hole with it, to cover up your filth.”<sup>17</sup>

It was not until the eighteenth century that Western Europe began to see the life-saving wisdom of this part of the Law. And hundreds of millions of people have not seen the wisdom of it yet.

(4) *The food laws.* Two chapters in the Law<sup>18</sup> are filled with lists of the birds, beasts and fishes which may and may not be eaten. With a few exceptions the lists agree with what modern man regards as healthy and unhealthy food. The flesh-eating creatures, the rats, the reptiles and most insects are forbidden; the vegetarian bird and beasts are permitted.

The main differences from modern practice are that pork and shellfish are forbidden by the Law, yet are eaten today. But there were good reasons for the Law's strictness. Today public health inspectors backed by an elaborate laboratory service can ensure that pigs and shellfish are reared under healthy conditions. Israel had no such facilities.

We know now that two serious diseases, cysticercosis and trichiniasis, can be caught through eating the flesh of pigs infected by parasitic worms. In a primitive society the only safe way to avoid these diseases is to steer clear of pork.

As for shellfish, they are quite harmless if they grow in water free from sewage. But if human excrement is present they feed on it, and then may harbour the germs of typhoid and other intestinal diseases. Modern science takes precautions against this, but the only precaution open to ancient Israel was to abstain from shellfish.

Even modern food science can sometimes slip up, and let an unsafe batch of shellfish on to the market. The last time (the very last!) that I ate oysters I was carried off on a stretcher at midnight. I had a week in hospital-ample time to reflect that Moses was wiser than I.

Cecil Roth has published some figures showing how the Jews have remained healthier than their neighbours right down to modern times.<sup>19</sup> One year when statistics were collected for the death rates among infants less than a year old in Czarist Russia, the rate for Jews was 13.2 per cent and for non-Jews 26.0 per cent. In Vienna it was 8.3 per cent for Jews, 16.1 per cent for non-Jews. In New York in 1915 it was 7.8 per cent for Jews, 10.5 per cent for non-Jews. "Even today [he wrote in 1956] the infant death rate in Israel is the lowest in the world."

### **Conservation of Resources**

In 1966 a new body was formed in London by a group of eminent British citizens. It is called "The Conservation Society", and its objects were defined as including:

"(iii) To promote the conservation in the interests of mankind of natural resources and animal life .

(iv) To promote the conservation of human cultures, skills and knowledge ..."<sup>20</sup>

It has taken the world all this time to realise that the world's resources are limited and need to be carefully conserved. Meanwhile, human foolishness and greed has done untold harm to the beautiful world in which we live.

Much of this harm could have been prevented if more people had obeyed the Law of Moses. For this Law taught the necessity of conservation of resources several thousand years before man seriously thought about it. Here are three examples:

(1) *Bird life.* If an Israelite caught a mother bird sitting on a nest, he must not take both the mother and her eggs or young. He could take the eggs or young birds, but had to let the mother go free to perpetuate the species.<sup>21</sup>

If only modern man had listened to Moses, the museums of the world would not now be full of stuffed examples of extinct birds. We should not have a saying, "Dead as the dodo". The beautiful passenger pigeon of North America, and the great auk of the North Atlantic, would still be thriving in their millions as they were at the beginning of the last century.

(2) *Arable land*. Every seventh year the Israelite had to let his arable land lie fallow (that is, uncultivated).<sup>22</sup> Under modern farming methods this is not necessary. But with more primitive methods of agriculture, constant cropping was liable to destroy the fertility of the land.

The Law of Moses provided an effective method of preventing human greed from ruining the good earth. But mankind disregarded the Law. All over the world man-made deserts sprawl where once were fertile fields. The deserts of Iraq, the coastal belt of North Africa, the dust bowls of the United States—all these might still be rich farmland if the Law had been obeyed.

(3) *Fruit trees*. In present day warfare anything goes—or almost anything. There are, it is true, a few "rules of war", dating back to the first Geneva Convention in 1864. But they are limited in scope, and not all countries recognise them. Even those that say they accept them sometimes break the rules when the crunch comes.

In the Vietnam war America introduced a new military tactic. It is called "defoliation". The U.S. air force has sprayed many thousands of tons of weedkiller over enemy-occupied territory. Vast areas of jungle where enemy troops once hid have been turned into a temporary desert. Rice crops and fruit trees have also been wiped out, and great numbers of Vietnamese have gone hungry in consequence. Such is "total war", as it is practised today.

But ancient Israel were forbidden to treat nature so ruthlessly. Even under the stress of war they were not allowed to chop down fruit trees to make defensive barriers. Though this might have reduced their own casualties, or even turned defeat into victory, they still must not do it. Moses told them why not: "for the tree of the field is man's life."<sup>23</sup>

Thus the Jewish Law of three thousand years ago was in this respect far wiser, far more civilised, than American law (or British law, for that matter) of today.

(4) *Human strength*. This was the most precious of all natural resources, in a world where machine power had not yet come to replace muscle power. The Law of Moses introduced a revolutionary new principle to conserve human strength—a compulsory day of rest, once a week.<sup>24</sup>

Those far-off days were not noted for any humanitarian tendencies. Yet the astonishing fact about the Sabbath law was this: *it applied to everybody in the land, Israelite and foreigner, master and slave alike.*<sup>25</sup>

Such an act of generosity on the part of rulers towards their slaves is without parallel in history. Yet Israel's Law commanded it, and, by and large, Israel obeyed.

The great medical historian, Karl Sudhoff, has said:

"Had Judaism given nothing more to mankind than the establishment of a weekly day of rest, we should still be forced to proclaim her one of the greatest benefactors of humanity."<sup>26</sup>

## Family Life

Jews have always been known for the happiness and stability of their home lives,

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, when wife-beating was expressly permitted by English law, the Jewish rabbis could say, "It is not the way of our people to beat their wives as the Gentiles do."<sup>27</sup>

In 1952 Jewish marriages involving divorced persons numbered 122 out of a total of 1,876, or 6.5 per cent. This was about half the comparable figure for the British people as a whole.<sup>28</sup> Most Jewish wives regard homemaking as a full time job. In 1950-52 only 11 per cent of Jewish women went out to work, compared with 34 per cent of the overall population.<sup>29</sup>

The secret of successful Jewish home life, like so many other things Jewish, lay in the Law. In the ancient world (as in primitive societies today) wives were often regarded as mere chattels, to be used, discarded and replaced at will. Children were nothing more than economic assets to the Gentile nations.

But Israel's Law was different. Jewish women had to be respected. Adultery, fornication and prostitution were very severely discouraged. Men had to treat their wives fairly, even if they disliked them.<sup>30</sup> Although divorce was not forbidden it was not encouraged, but was carefully regulated.<sup>31</sup> And the ideal Jewish marriage was clearly specified in the beginning: one man and one woman, joined together for life.<sup>32</sup>

The Law laid great stress upon the careful upbringing of children. It was a father's responsibility to see that his children were well educated in God's ways.<sup>33</sup>

The Jewish religion would never have survived without this stress on religious education within every family. At the same time it has had a useful by-product for the Jews. They have always been more advanced than any other nation in every form of education. Without doubt, their success in the world is partly due to this.

Thus, for example, a census taken in 1861 revealed that more than half the adult population of Italy could not read or write, but that only one Italian Jew in 17 could not read or write.<sup>34</sup> A census of university students in Britain in 1954-5 revealed that 2.8 per cent of students were Jews,<sup>35</sup> although Jews form only 0.8 per cent of the country's population.

### **How Did Moses Manage It?**

Once more we have a remarkable fact to face. The Law of Moses (contained in the first five books of the Bible) was astonishingly advanced in its provisions. It was at least three thousand years ahead of its time. The rest of the world did not realise the wisdom of many parts of the Law until the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

How are we going to account for this? How did Moses manage to give his people such a revolutionary and brilliantly successful law?

Here is Moses' own explanation:

"What great nation is there that hath a god so nigh unto them as the Lord our God is?...

What great nation is there that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this Law?...

The Lord spake unto you . . . The Lord commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and judgments.”<sup>36</sup>

Moses took no credit for himself. He was not the greatest legalistic genius of all time. He was not a man 3,000 years ahead of his time. It was not his brain that anticipated so many discoveries of modern sociology, hygiene, medicine and economics. *His Law, he says, came from God.*

This explanation by Moses fits the facts. Is there an alternative explanation that fits them half as well? How do the unbelievers explain the stubborn facts?

The answer is that they don't. They cannot provide a rational explanation for the facts, so they fall back once more on the technique of side-stepping them.

“Moses didn't write the Law,” they cry. “It was compiled by other men, between five and ten centuries after the time of Moses.”

As if that made any difference! If true, it would only make the Law two thousand-odd years ahead of its time, instead of three thousand. And in any case, as we shall see later, it is by no means proved that Moses did not write the Law.

So they try another tactic. “Pah, this is just a load of pro-Jewish propaganda!”

Again: so what? Facts are still facts, even if somebody throws dirty words like “propaganda” at them. And in any case, it is not true. My feelings are certainly pro-Bible, but they are not pro-Jewish. I have no particular liking, nor any dislike, for the Jews. I am just a neutral observer of what anyone can see to be an extraordinary people, with an extraordinary Law.

Ask yourself: how do *you* explain these facts? You know how Moses explained them. He said that he received his astonishing Law from God Almighty.

If this is not true, how did he manage to produce such a Law?

### ***The Ring of Truth***

I shall never forget the day my father showed me my first counterfeit coin. "Look at this, son," he said. "I've been done!" He held it lightly between the fingers and thumbs of both hands, and bent it easily into a horseshoe shape. I gasped with surprise and watched, fascinated, as he bent it back to its original shape. He passed it to me and I examined it. It still looked like a genuine half crown.

"How did you know it was a dud, Dad?" I asked. "Because of this," he replied, taking it from me and dropping it on the shop counter. "Hear that dull clonking noise? Now listen to the ringing note you get from a real one." He dropped a genuine half crown beside the counterfeit. There was no mistaking the different sound. Even my schoolboy ear could detect the ring of truth.

### **Experience Counts**

In every walk of life people learn to sense the difference between true and false. Old hands in the teaching profession can glance down an examination room, and pick out the one boy who is trying to crib. The customs officer gradually learns to spot which suitcases are worth opening. The experienced magistrate can nearly always tell when a witness is lying. In every walk of life things either ring true, or they ring false. But before you can detect the ring of truth with any certainty you need experience. It is therefore significant that *those who know the Bible best trust it the most.*

A Bible lover once told an anecdote about a pompous colonel at a dinner table. "In my opinion," he declared, "the Koran is vastly superior to the Bible." "Excuse me, Colonel," said a clergyman. "Do you mind if I ask you two questions? Have you ever read the Bible from beginning to end?" The colonel admitted that he had not, and waited uneasily for the second question. "Have you ever even seen a copy of the Koran?"

When the colonel again answered that he hadn't, the clergyman asked him what he thought of himself. "You publicly declare that a book you have never seen is vastly superior to a book that you have never read right through!"

That story rings true. I have met dozens and dozens of people like the colonel, who condemn the Bible vigorously but have never read it. On the other hand I know people whose whole attitude to the Bible changed entirely when once they started to read it. As they read it, they could see that here was a book that rang true.

As an example, take the fourth book of Moses, called the book of Numbers. You will see that it consists of three main elements:

- (1) Lists of names, places and statistics about the nation of Israel. (Hence the name, "Numbers".)
- (2) Detailed laws and regulations (mainly of a religious character).
- (3) Stories of things that happened to Israel, and things they did, during their forty years in the wilderness.

Now does this book ring true, or not? Many people who have studied it are convinced that it does. Those lists of names may make very dull reading today, but their very existence, scattered throughout the book, has the ring of truth about it.

If those lists were written by Moses, we can see the reason for them. They were very important to the people named in them. But it is very hard to imagine why a forger, writing hundreds of years later, should bother to compile such lists.

The historical parts of the book also ring true. Nearly all the stories show up Israel in an unfavourable light. Some of them throw an unfavourable light upon Moses himself. But they all portray human nature just as we know it to be: generally weak, obstinate, prejudiced, ungrateful, hasty, faithless-but now and again rising above itself, and reaching heights of glory.

In the years between the two world wars the greatest living Englishman spent a quiet life at Chartwell. Churchill was biding his time, waiting until his country needed him again.

In those days he had plenty of time to think, and his great mind did not shrink from reaching unpopular conclusions. He, almost alone, told the world the truth about the Nazi menace.

*And Churchill also told the world that the books of Moses rang true.*

He wrote in his essay on Moses:

“We must, at this point, examine briefly the whole question of the miracles . . . We [meaning himself] reject, however, with scorn all those learned and laboured myths that Moses was but a legendary figure upon whom the priesthood and the people hung their essential social, moral and religious ordinances. We believe that *the most scientific view*, the most up-to-date and rationalistic conception, will find its *fullest satisfaction in taking the Bible story literally* . . . We remain unmoved by the tomes of Professor Grad-grind and Dr Dryasdust. *We may be sure that all these things happened just as they are set out in Holy Writ.* We may believe that they happened to people not so ‘very different from ourselves, and that the impressions those people received were faithfully recorded and have been transmitted across the centuries with far more accuracy than many of the telegraphed accounts we read of the goings-on of today. In the words of a forgotten work of Mr Gladstone, *we rest with assurance upon ‘The impregnable rock of Holy Scripture’.*”<sup>1</sup> (The italics are mine.)

Why did Churchill reach such an unorthodox conclusion? First, because he read his Bible thoroughly and carefully. And secondly, because he was never a man to be swayed by the weight of public opinion; he was prepared to think things out for himself.

## Ding and Dong

It is easier to detect the clear “ding” of the true coin when you can compare it with the dull “dong” of the false.

You can apply this test to the gospels. In addition to the four gospels of our Bible, there are a number of so-called gospels. They were written in the second, third and fourth centuries.

Here is a typical passage from the “Gospel of Nicodemus”, describing the entry of Jesus into Pilate’s judgment hall:

And Jesus going in, and the standard-bearers holding their standards, the tops of the standards were bent down and adored Jesus. And the Jews seeing the bearing of the standards, how they bent down and adored Jesus, cried Out vehemently against the standard bearers . . . [It goes on for a whole page, with the Jews arguing about whether the standards really bent down miraculously. Then Pilate agrees to try and repeat the miracle.) . . . And the procurator ordered Jesus to come in the second time. And the runner did in the same manner as before, and made many entreaties to Jesus to walk on his cloak. And He walked on it, and went in. And as He went in, the standards were again bent down and adored Jesus.”<sup>2</sup>

Now compare this with the simple dignity of the Biblical accounts:

“And when they had bound Him they led Him away, and delivered Him to Pontius Pilate the governor.” (Matthew)

“And straightway in the morning the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council, and bound Jesus and carried Him away, and delivered Him to Pilate.” (Mark)

“And the whole company of them rose up and brought Him before Pilate.” (Luke)

“Then led they Jesus from Caiaphas unto the hall of judgment. (John)

Another example. There are many ancient accounts of the creation of the world in the sacred books of mankind. Here are two typical specimens:

(1) Berosus, a Babylonian priest, said that the god Belus came out and cut the woman Omoraka asunder, and of one half of her he formed the earth and of the other half of her the heavens. Later, Belus commanded one of the gods to take off his head and to mix the blood with the earth, and with this mixture to make men and animals.

(2) Manu, the reputed writer of the Hindus' most sacred books, said that Brahma was hatched out of a golden egg. He lived in it for a time, and then made heaven Out of one part of the egg and earth out of the other.

Against these, the Bible gives us another alternative:

“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was waste and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, ‘Let there be light.’ And there was light.”<sup>3</sup>

There is obviously a tremendous gulf between the other books and the Bible. All other ancient creation stories sound like the product of a ‘vivid imagination running riot. The Biblical record still makes sense in this scientific age. It reads like a sober statement of some momentous facts.

### **Truth is Often Painful**

When the translators of the Bible into English produced their “Authorised Version” in 1611, they dedicated it to King James I. Their “epistle of dedication” is still printed in some editions of this version. It begins like this:

“Great and manifold were the blessings, most dread Sovereign, which Almighty God, the Father of all mercies, bestowed upon us the people of England, when first He sent your Majesty’s Royal Person to rule and reign over us...

Talk about flattery! And it goes on and on in the same ‘vein for two whole pages. Obviously the translators knew which side their bread was buttered on.

Doubtless King James had his good points. He must also have had some faults. But you will find no hint of them in this very human document. It portrays King James as perfection itself.

How differently the Bible speaks of its greatest heroes. It gives a balanced picture of them all. It tells us what to admire in them, and why God blessed them. With equal frankness it informs us where each one fell down.

So we know that Abraham, the father of the Jewish race, betrayed his wife to save his own skin. That Jacob, whose other name Israel was given to the nation, cheated his twin brother. That David, Israel’s greatest king, was once so consumed with passion that he followed adultery with murder.

Is there another ancient history book that makes no attempt to whitewash its heroes? That has the ring of honest truth about it whenever it talks about the nation’s leaders? If there is, I have never known an atheist who could produce it.

You may have seen a copy of Adolf Hitler’s book, *Mein Kampf*. This is an example of flattery in the reverse direction-an ambitious politician flattering his people. Hitler told the Germans that they were a superior race and they loved him for it. History might have been very different if he had told them they were a bad lot.

But the Jewish national book told the Jews the plain, painful truth. They were the most privileged nation on earth. And yet their Bible told them in nearly every book that they were utterly unworthy of their privileges.

Here are just a few examples:

(1) God delivered them from a life of cruel slavery in Egypt. But they kept wanting to go back.

(2) God fed them miraculously with “bread from heaven” in the desert. Yet they kept grumbling that it didn’t taste very good.

(3) God promised to bring them safely into the Promised Land. He said that He would use His power to drive out their enemies. But they were afraid to go in.

(4) Once in the Land of Promise they promptly started worshipping idols.

(5) For the next thousand years their history was one long story of idolatry. interrupted by spells of comparative godliness when occasional good leaders were at the helm.

(6) Then God punished them with a spell of captivity in Babylon. When He gave them the opportunity to return home, many of them preferred to stay in idolatrous Babylon.

(7) Those who did go home behaved badly, right until the end of the Old Testament period. The very last book of the Old Testament, on its last page, says, “Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them.”<sup>4</sup>

There is the ring of truth about a book like this. No flattery, no suppression of unpleasant facts, but history as it ought to be told-clearly and objectively.

A hundred years ago Henry Rogers summed up his reasons for believing in the Bible like this:

“The Bible is not such a book as man would have made if he could-or could have made if he would.”

In Chapters 2 to 8 we saw the truth of the first half of this statement. Man (unaided by God) simply *could not* have produced a book like the Bible.

Now we have seen the truth of the other half of Rogers' statement. Man (left to himself) *would not* have produced a book as full of painful truth as the Bible.

## A Perfect Match

Few people today seem to have heard of Professor J. J. Blunt, who was once the Margaret Professor of Divinity at Cambridge. Yet he was one of England's most diligent Bible students.

In 1847 he published a book<sup>5</sup> reporting the results of many years of research. He specialised in comparing one part of the Bible with another, and finding what he called “undesigned coincidences” between two (or more) books. This is the sort of thing that he discovered.

He brought together the three following passages, from the books of Numbers, Joshua and 1 Samuel respectively:

“There we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants. And we were in our own sight as grasshoppers.”<sup>6</sup>

“And Joshua came at that time and cut off the Anakim .

Joshua utterly destroyed them with their cities. There was none of the Anakim left in the land of the children of Israel; only in Gaza, in Gath and in Ashdod did some remain.”<sup>7</sup>

“There went out a champion out of the camp of the Philistines, named Goliath of Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span (about 9 feet).”<sup>8</sup>

Now, says Blunt in effect, see what these three passages tell us. They were written by three different authors at three different periods of history. Yet they match each other just like a cup, saucer and plate from the same teaset.

The first passage reveals that before Israel entered the Promised Land there were many giants there. These giants were called “sons of Anak”, or “Anakim” (which is merely the plural form of the Hebrew name “Anak”).

The second passage says that when Israel conquered the Promised Land, they destroyed nearly all this race descended from Anak. But they did leave a few of these giants in three towns: Gaza, Gath, and Ashdod.

The third passage casually mentions that the giant Goliath's home town was Gath. Is it likely that the writer of this third passage was a fiction writer who scoured the earlier books of the Bible, until he found the “right” town to put his giant in? Or was it just a fluke that he happened to pick one of the only three appropriate towns in all Israel?

No, there is the ring of truth about this set of passages. They sound much more like accurate history than cunningly contrived fiction.

## Ahithophel's Treachery Explained

In another chapter Blunt brings together a whole string of apparently unrelated chapters from one book, with remarkable results. The Bible passages involved are too numerous to quote here in full. I shall just give the substance of them and quote the references.

But first, a little background information. There were two great tragedies in the later part of King David's life. The first was his terrible moral lapse, when he committed adultery with Bathsheba and then murdered her husband, Uriah the Hittite. The second occurred when his own son Absalom rebelled against him and temporarily seized his throne.

The Bible tells us that the second incident was God's punishment on David for the first. But it does not tell us that there was also a purely human connection between the two incidents. The Bible left that for some future student to dig out for himself.

This is what Blunt discovered.

When Absalom decided to stage a rebellion, he sent for a man called Ahithophel the Gilonite to join him.<sup>9</sup> Now this was a very surprising action. Ahithophel was David's own right hand man, "mine own familiar friend in whom I trusted", as David called him.<sup>10</sup>

It was a remarkable act of treachery on Ahithophel's part. It was so unexpected to David that he never could get over it.<sup>11</sup> Yet Absalom clearly expected Ahithophel to change sides readily. Why?

Blunt found a clue to the answer in one of those long lists of names that many Bible readers skip over. In the list of the 37 officers of David's guard occur two 'vital names: Uriah the Hittite (the man David murdered), and "Eli am the son of Ahithophel the Gilonite"<sup>12</sup>

-that is, the son of the traitor.

So the son of the future traitor and the murdered man had been close colleagues, and probably friends. But this is not all. From an entirely different part of the book we learn that Bathsheba, the wife of the murdered man, was "the daughter of Eliam".<sup>13</sup> Uriah had evidently married the daughter of his fellow-officer. (It was common in those days for older men of the upper class to marry very young women.)

With these facts before us it is easy to see why Absalom anticipated Ahithophel's treachery, while David was astonished by it. *The girl that the elderly David had seduced was Ahithophel's granddaughter.* The man David had murdered was Ahithophel's grandson by marriage.

Blinded by his own passion, David could not see what effect this had upon Ahithophel. But Absalom was well aware that Ahithophel was seething with anger, and ready for revenge.

A later chapter confirms that revenge was one of Ahithophel's motives. When they first captured David's palace, Absalom asked Ahithophel what to do next. "Go in unto thy father's concubines (wives)"<sup>14</sup> was the reply. As much as to say: "Pay him back in his own coin. He stole another man's wife; now you steal his!" The record continues:

"So they spread Absalom a tent upon the top of the house, and Absalom went in unto his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel."<sup>15</sup>

Thus the wheel had turned full circle. It was upon his housetop that David was walking when he caught his first glimpse of Bathsheba washing herself and lusted for her.<sup>16</sup> Now, in the selfsame place, her wily old grandfather arranges David's public humiliation.

It goes without saying that this fascinating story-hidden-within-a-story could not have been deliberately contrived. No forger would hide his forgery so carefully that it remained undiscovered for nearly 3,000 years, as this did. Either these passages represent a whole series of lucky coincidences or-much more probably-they are an integral part of real history, told with meticulous accuracy.

There are something like a hundred of these undesigned coincidences in Blunt's book. Nearly every one of them has the ring of truth about it.

A somewhat similar book by Paley and Birks, restricted to New Testament history, lists many more.<sup>17</sup> Bible students are constantly discovering still more of them for themselves.

Try discovering large numbers of undesigned coincidences in any work of fiction you like to choose. You will not succeed. They are the hallmark of true history, not fiction.

## ***Harmony Doesn't Just Happen***

Some years ago, at the time when I was still trying to convince Norman of the truth of the Bible, we went together to a symphony concert. Afterwards I kicked myself for missing an opportunity. On the way home I ought to have started up a conversation like this:

“Tell me, Norman, have you ever wondered what would happen if the conductor should be taken ill in the middle of a symphony?”

“I suppose they'd appoint another conductor from among the instrumentalists. If not, they'd just have to give up playing. They certainly couldn't carry on without a conductor.”

“Quite so. Now suppose that you were to go blind, and someone took you to a concert. The orchestra are performing magnificently. Suddenly the man in the next seat tells you that they are playing without a conductor. Would you believe him?”

“Of course not. Even if I couldn't see the conductor I should know that he must be there from the way the orchestra was playing. Harmony doesn't just happen, you know. There must be a conductor to create it.”

And then I could have gone on to apply that principle to the Bible itself. Here we have a collection of sixty-six books, by about forty different authors, written over a period of at least a thousand years. (Much longer than a thousand years, if you accept what the Bible says about its own authors.)

Yet the harmony running through all these books is outstanding. They all teach the same great doctrines about life and death, sin and salvation. From Genesis to Revelation there is one steadily unfolding, consistent story: God has a plan for the earth and the human race, and is slowly but surely seeing it through to completion.

Harmony doesn't just happen. If the “orchestra” is playing well, we can infer the existence of a “Conductor”. We may be too blind to see the Hand that guided the forty Biblical authors, but their harmony is evidence that He exists.

### **Was It Done Deliberately?**

The unbeliever has a ready excuse. He cannot deny that a certain amount of harmony is there, and so he suggests that the Bible writers themselves deliberately created it. Each writer knew what the general teaching of the previous writers was, so he framed his own book to fall in line, says the unbeliever.

At the same time the unbeliever adopts his favourite method of defence. He sidesteps smartly. “And anyway,” he retorts, “there's an awful lot of disharmony in the Bible, too!”

If you press him to specify the “awful lot of disharmony” he generally becomes uncomfortable. Before long he has to admit that he has greatly overstated his case. There is not “an awful lot of disharmony”. In the end, if he tries very hard, he may manage to produce one or two examples of what he calls “contradictions”.

I shall deal more fully with this accusation that the Bible contradicts itself in Chapter 19. Meanwhile, here is just one very important point.

The so-called contradictions all lie on the surface.

The harmonies are fundamental, deep-rooted.

*And this is just what you would expect to find in a collection of books that are true.*

Ask any lawyer how he reacts if he hears two witnesses telling exactly the same story. He suspects collaboration between them. Their evidence is too good to be true. He cross-examines them closely. And when he probes deeply he soon discovers whether they are lying or not.

But with truthful witnesses it is quite different. They may easily *appear* to disagree. If the crime took place at a street corner, one witness may say it happened in X Street, and the other in Y Street. In this case, cross-examination will soon establish that both were telling the truth. The more deeply the lawyer probes, the more he will uncover the harmony lying behind the two witnesses' accounts.

Now to return to the unbeliever's first line of defence. He argues that the harmony between the various books of the Bible is there because the writers deliberately produced it.

Does this sound reasonable? Is it likely that all those authors-soldiers, kings, prophets, fishermen, a tax collector, a lawyer, a doctor, men from the dawn of civilisation and men from the sophisticated world of Rome-would all agree to tell the same tale? Is human nature like that?

Try this experiment. Make a collection of prominent documents from Christian churches and sects today. Get a Roman Catholic missal, a Church of England Prayer Book, the *Book of Mormon*) the Christian Scientists' textbook *Science and Health*, and a copy of the Jehovah's Witnesses' *Watchtower*.

Put them all together, and look at them. What do you find? Complete, utter, indescribable chaos!

Left to themselves religious writers always disagree, even when they supposedly share the same faith. If there really is harmony between 11 the writers of the Bible, it is absurd to argue that they themselves deliberately produced it.

At this point you would probably like me to prove that the harmony have been talking about really exists. But this is not altogether within my power. I cannot prove to a young "pop" fan that Beethoven's music is enjoyable. I can only urge him to persevere with listening to it, until he is able to enjoy it for himself.

So it is with the Bible. If you want to know whether it is full of harmony or not, there is really only one way. You must read the Bible, right through, and then read it again.

Here are some of the major themes of the Bible that you will find. They all run through the Bible from beginning to end:

- (1) The rottenness and hopelessness of human nature left to itself.
- (2) How human sin can be forgiven, and human nature changed.
- (3) God's offer of eternal life, and the terms on which He offers it.
- (4) God's promise and plan to fill this earth with His glory.
- (5) The Son of God as the centre of all God's work'.

These themes are so great that you can only follow them through the Bible for yourself. Nevertheless, the rest of this chapter will be devoted to a few of the lesser themes of the Bible. They illustrate its harmony on a small scale, small enough for you to grasp at a first look.

### **The Failure of the Firstborns**

In the early years of this century there lived in South Wales a working man known far and wide as "Brother Joe". His friends used to say that he knew the Bible better than anyone else in the world. Whether that was true or not, he certainly had a remarkable grasp of the Bible. You could name almost any chapter, and he would instantly tell you what it was about, what lessons could be learnt from it, and how it linked up with other parts of the Bible. All this despite a complete lack of education, and despite being tied to long hours of heavy manual labour in a steelworks.

Because of his intense love of the Bible, and the way he spent every spare minute reading it and thinking about it, he made many interesting discoveries. One of the most fascinating was what he called, "The story of the failure of the firstborns."

To the Jews, the firstborn son of a family was very important. He had special privileges over his brothers. Under the Jewish laws of inheritance, he was entitled to a double portion.

When God wanted to stress the high calling of His chosen nation, He said, "Israel is My son, My firstborn."<sup>1</sup>

Yet despite all this stress on the importance of being a firstborn, not one of the successful men of the Old Testament is said to be a firstborn. Every firstborn of the Old Testament who might have had a position of honour was in some way a failure. Every single one disappointed God, and was passed over by God in favour of a younger brother.

The first man, Adam, had a firstborn son called Cain. He was a murderer. God rejected him, and the "chosen line" (that is, the line of descent of the Messiah) passed to a younger son, Seth.

Noah had three sons. They are always listed in this order: Shem, Ham and Japheth. To a casual reader it looks as if Shem must have been the eldest.<sup>2</sup> But if we compare a series of verses giving the ages of Noah at various times in his life, and then do a little arithmetic, we soon see that this was not so. Noah's first son was born when he was 500 years old,<sup>3</sup> whereas Shem was born when Noah was 503.<sup>4</sup> Ham is specifically said to be a younger son.<sup>5</sup>

Hence we know that Japheth must have been Noah's firstborn. But for some reason God passed him over, and the chosen line passed to Shem, a younger brother.

There is a similar story with Abraham and his brothers. They are listed in this order: Abram, Nahor and Haran.<sup>6</sup> But Abram (better known as Abraham) was not the firstborn. He is listed first because he is the chosen one of the family.

The Bible does not state directly that Abram was not the firstborn. This fact only emerges when we compare three different verses, and again do a few sums.<sup>7</sup>

Abraham's firstborn son was Ishmael, "a wild man",<sup>8</sup> who was passed over in favour of Isaac. Isaac's firstborn was Esau. He was a "profane person",<sup>9</sup> and the chosen line passed to his younger brother, Jacob.

Jacob's firstborn was Reuben, but he sinned grievously.<sup>10</sup> So the honour of delivering the family in its hour of need went to one younger brother, Joseph, and the chosen line passed to another younger brother, Judah.

Joseph's firstborn was passed over in favour of a younger brother, despite Joseph's protests.<sup>11</sup> Judah's firstborn was so wicked that he was slain by God,<sup>12</sup> and the chosen line was continued through a much younger brother.

When the two brothers Moses and Aaron are mentioned together it is usually in that order. Moses comes first, because he was the more important and the stronger character. (Aaron once slipped into idolatry.) But Aaron was 3 years older than Moses,<sup>13</sup> and presumably (since no other brothers are mentioned) the firstborn of the family. Many years later, God sent the prophet Samuel to a man called Jesse. God said: "I have provided me a king among his sons."<sup>14</sup> Samuel was very favourably impressed with the elder sons. But God made him pass them over, and appoint the youngest son, David, as king.

The first six sons of David are listed like this:

"His firstborn was Amnon... second Chileab... third Absalom ... fourth Adonijah... fifth Shephatiah ...sixth Ithream."<sup>15</sup>

Amnon the firstborn seduced his own sister and then cast her aside. This so angered his brother Absalom that he murdered him. Chileab, Shephatiah and Ithream are never mentioned again; presumably they died in infancy.

This left Absalom as the heir apparent; he tried to take the throne by force and was killed. Adonijah was next in line. He also tried to take the throne by force, and was killed.

Why did these two princes give their lives trying to grab what appeared to be theirs by right? Because God had already made it plain that He had passed them over in favour of a younger son, Solomon.<sup>16</sup>

Part of the wonder of the Bible is that what it omits to say is often just as significant as what it does say. Some of Israel's good kings may actually have been firstborn sons. Josiah may well have been, since he was born when his father was only sixteen.<sup>17</sup> But none of them is *said* to be a firstborn.

Thus the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament present us with one consistent harmonious theme. *Not one acknowledged firstborn is ever a success in God's sight.*

To the believer, the reason for this remarkable harmony is obvious. It points forward to the two great lessons of the New Testament.

The first lesson is that all ordinary human firstborn-the cream of the race, so to speak-are failures in God's eyes. The world had to wait for God's own firstborn Son to be born before it could see a successful firstborn.<sup>18</sup>

The second lesson is that God's "firstborn nation",<sup>19</sup> Israel, would be a failure. They would have to be replaced by a younger nation, "The Israel of God",<sup>20</sup> which is the New Testament name for all those, whether Jew or Gentile, who truly follow Christ.

The unbeliever is faced with one more extraordinary fact that demands an explanation. If the writers of the Old Testament were not inspired by God, what made them all combine to produce this instructive piece of harmony?

They certainly did not do it deliberately, because none of them draws attention to it. In two cases (Abraham and Shem) the fact that the firstborn is the unsuccessful son is hidden; to establish it we have to compare several verses and make some calculations.

Indeed, the whole story of "the failure of the firstborns" is carefully concealed, buried deep in the pages of Scripture. We might still be unaware of it if a horny-handed working man who loved his Bible had not unearthed it for us.

What sort of book is this Bible, that contains such wonders for us to find? Does it make sense to believe that unaided human beings produced such harmony by accident?

### **The Story of Sweat**

The word "sweat" is found in only three places in the Bible. Those places are widely separated. One is at the beginning of the Old Testament, one near its end, and one in the New Testament. Yet between them they summarise the whole Christian gospel.

The first mention of sweat is in the Garden of Eden. Adam has just sinned, and God is passing sentence upon him, in these words:

"In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground. For out of it wast thou taken; for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return."<sup>21</sup>

This sums up the penalty the whole human race pays for its wickedness. First sweat; then dust. First a difficult, tiring life. Then death, the final "wages of sin",<sup>22</sup> as Paul describes it.

For the next passage we must turn to the New Testament. There we are introduced to a second "Adam".<sup>23</sup> Whereas the first Adam was to *eat* bread by the sweat of his brow, the second Adam *provided* bread—the "Bread of Life", to use the words of John's Gospel.<sup>24</sup> Luke describes Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, on His way to the Cross. This is part of what it cost Jesus to provide the Bread of Life:

"And being in an agony He prayed more earnestly. And His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground."<sup>25</sup>

By likening his Master's sweat to "drops of blood", Luke is evidently hinting that His sacrifice was already beginning. And so it was, for Jesus had just said to his Father, "Not my will, but Thine, be done."<sup>26</sup> This is the very essence of sacrifice, to do God's will, however much it hurts.

Two gardens, Eden and Gethsemane. They are related to each other like the positive and negative of the same photograph. Sin appeared in Eden, and the sweat of suffering and the dust of death were the consequences. The sweat of sacrifice began to appear in Gethsemane. And the forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life were the consequences.

The third mention of sweat is at the end of Ezekiel's prophecy. This describes a temple the like of which has never been built on earth. If we follow the guidance of the New Testament,<sup>27</sup> this is a symbolic picture (a kind of parable, if you like) of Christ's redeemed disciples, enjoying immortality in the eternal Kingdom of God.

"They shall have linen bonnets upon their heads, and shall have linen breeches upon their loins; they shall not gird themselves with anything that causeth sweat."<sup>28</sup>

The Bible tells us what linen stands for. It is a symbol of righteousness.<sup>29</sup> So in Ezekiel's picture the redeemed are at last freed for ever from sin, and from the "sweat" (suffering, leading to death) that Adam brought into the world.

The single theme linking these three passages, the only ones in the whole Bible where sweat is mentioned, is too remarkable to be accidental. It is impossible that Ezekiel and Luke could have produced it deliberately, because Ezekiel's passage only makes sense in the light of Luke-and Ezekiel wrote long before Luke was born.

The three passages fit together as if they had been designed to do so. How can we explain this, unless we accept the Bible's own explanation-that one Designer guided the pens of all three writers?<sup>30</sup>

#### **Four Remarkable Women**

Both Matthew and Luke give us a genealogy (that is, a line of descent) of Jesus Christ. There are some interesting problems connected with these genealogies, but they must wait until Part Two.

For the present we are only concerned with one remarkable feature of Matthew's genealogy. He traces the line of ancestors from Abraham down to Jesus. Mostly he follows the Jewish custom of mentioning only the male ancestors. But not altogether. In four instances he mentions the wife also. Matthew gives no explanation for this. He leaves us to do our own Bible study and draw our own conclusions. If we do so the results are quite exciting.

The four women are Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and "her that had been the wife of Uriah".<sup>31</sup> Here is a summary of what the Old Testament tells us about them.

Tamar, a Canaanitish girl, was Judah's daughter-in-law. Her husband died young because of his wickedness. Judah then promised to give her his younger son, Shelah, for a husband. But he broke his promise.

As a protest against being let down Tamar disguised herself, pretended to be a prostitute, and seduced her father-in-law. From this illicit union a child was born, from whom all the Jewish kings were descended.

Rahab was another Canaanite with a sordid background. She began life as a prostitute. When Israel invaded Canaan she recognised that they really were the people of the one true God. She

went over to Israel's side, became (it would appear) a reformed character, and married an Israelite.

Ruth was a Moabite woman. Although she was reared in a land full of idolatry she was a fine character. She became converted to the Israelitish faith, emigrated to Israel's land, and found a husband there.

“Her that had been the wife of Uriah” (Bathsheba) was mentioned in Chapter 9. King David violated her, murdered her husband, and married her. Since Uriah was a Hittite this was presumably her nationality also, until David married her.

By mentioning these four women Matthew draws our attention to another very unexpected piece of Bible harmony. Each woman's story is told in a different book: Tamar's in Genesis, Rahab's in Joshua, Bathsheba's in 2 Samuel, and Ruth's in the book that bears her own name. But they all have several things in common:

(1) They were all Gentiles.

(2) They were all the subject of a special dispensation of mercy. If the law had been enforced, none of them would have married into Israel. The immorality of Tamar and Bathsheba was punishable by death under Jewish law. Rahab should ordinarily have perished with all the other inhabitants of Jericho. Ruth was a Moabite, and members of that race were expressly barred from adopting Israelitish nationality.<sup>32</sup>

(3) Yet despite these barriers they were all links in the ancestry of all the Jewish kings-and of Jesus Christ.

Thus, running like a golden thread through Jewish history, the stories of these women condemned the rulers of the Jews for their narrow-mindedness. Throughout their history God had been far more merciful than they were.

They regarded the Gentiles as little better than animals. They were meticulous about keeping the Law of Moses, and severely punished wrongdoers. Yet they could not deny that their own Scriptures declared these four Gentile women, to whom they would have shown no mercy, to be in their Messianic line.

One thing we can be quite sure of. This particular piece of harmony was so embarrassing to the Jews that they would not have created it deliberately. They must have wished that they could have deleted it from their history.

How, then, can we explain its existence, unless we attribute it to the hand of God?

### **The First Iron Curtain**

The first iron curtain in recorded history is probably the one described in the Old Testament. Like the present wall across Germany, this one also split a nation into two pieces.

After 120 years as one united kingdom, the ten tribes in the north of Israel broke away from the two tribes in the south. The larger northern kingdom was called Israel, and set up its capital at Samaria. The smaller southern kingdom was called Judah, and retained the original capital, Jerusalem.

The northern kingdom of Israel never had one godly king. For nearly three hundred years it lived in idolatry. Then the Assyrians conquered it, and carried its people into captivity. They were never heard of again.

The southern kingdom of Judah had a mixture of good and bad kings. Its people were carried into captivity by the Babylonians about a hundred years after the northern kingdom fell to the Assyrians. But their grandchildren were allowed to return to their homeland. Their descendants were still populating the land of Israel under the name "Jews" in the time of Christ.

The people of the northern kingdom are often referred to as "the lost ten tribes". This is very curious, because there is a thread of harmony running through many books of the Bible which shows that the ten tribes were not lost at all.

This thread is obviously not deliberately contrived. It is so unobtrusive, in fact, that many people still cannot see it-hence that strange popular misconception that the ten tribes were lost. But the thread is there, none the less.

It starts in the First Book of Kings, where we read of a very early king of Israel, Baasha, making his iron curtain. He fortified the border, "that he might not suffer any to go out or come in to Asa, king of Judah".<sup>33</sup>

Why did he do that? Other books of the Old Testament supply the answer. Like the builders of the Berlin wall he was not concerned about keeping an enemy out, but with keeping his own people in. All the Godfearing people in the idolatrous north wanted to emigrate to the south, where the Temple in Jerusalem kept true worship alive.

Baasha's iron curtain was inefficient. He lacked the barbed wire and minefields beloved of modern dictators. The Second Book of Chronicles tells us that when good king Asa purged all the idols out of the Kingdom of Judah, this was the result:

"He gathered all Judah and Benjamin, and them that sojourned with them out of Ephraim and Manasseh and out of Simeon. *For they fell to him out of Israel in abundance*, when they saw that the Lord his God was with him."<sup>34</sup>

A later chapter in the same book tells of another good king of Judah, Jehoshaphat, who also received a wave of immigrants from Israel.<sup>35</sup> They must have been very numerous, because Jehoshaphat<sup>4</sup> is actually called "King of *Israel*" in one place,<sup>36</sup> as if to indicate that men from all twelve tribes owed him allegiance.

The result of all this immigration was a rapid increase in the size of Judah's army. At the time of the split, King Rehoboam had only 180,000 men.<sup>37</sup> The next king, Abijah, had 400,000;<sup>38</sup> his successor, Asa, 580,000;<sup>39</sup> and Jehoshaphat had 1,160,000 men.<sup>40</sup>

About a hundred years after the Kingdom of Israel had been wiped Out, and the ten tribes were supposedly lost, King Josiah of Judah was receiving tribute from "Manasseh, and Ephraim and of *all the remnant of Israel*, and of all Judah and Benjamin."<sup>41</sup> Just before they were carried captive into Babylon, Ezekiel described the inhabitants of Jerusalem as "all the residue of Israel . . . the house of Israel and Judah".<sup>42</sup>

Jeremiah hinted that both Judah *and Israel* would return from captivity in Babylon.<sup>43</sup> A modern translation of 1 Chronicles makes it plain that the “Judah” who returned from captivity included men of Israel, and especially of its two leading tribes, Ephraim and Manasseh.<sup>44</sup>

Finally, so far as the Old Testament is concerned, the book of Ezra describes the return of the Jews from their Babylonian captivity, around 500 B.C. Those Jews are described several times as “Israel”, and on two occasions when they offered sacrifices these comprised *twelve* animals “according to the number of the tribes of Israel”.<sup>45</sup>

Quite clearly, then, the Old Testament tells us that only the dregs of the “lost ten tribes” were ever lost. The cream of the ten tribes were absorbed into the two-tribed Kingdom of Judah, which later became called the Jewish nation.

Our thread of harmony has so far run through six different Old Testament books, and covered some 500 years of history. It now jumps the 500-year gap between Ezra and the New Testament, and reappears in the gospels.

Matthew takes a prophecy that Jeremiah made about the children of Rachel (the ten-tribed kingdom), and says it was fulfilled among the Jews of his day.<sup>46</sup> Luke reports Jesus as quoting a prophecy from Hosea about the ten-tribed kingdom, and applying it to the Jews in Jerusalem.<sup>47</sup> He also mentions that a woman in Jerusalem, Anna, was of the tribe of Asher (one of the ten).<sup>48</sup>

Peter addresses the Jews as, “Men of Israel . . . *all* the house of Israel.”<sup>49</sup> Paul said that John the Baptist had preached to “*all* the people of Israel”.<sup>50</sup> On another occasion Paul called the Jews “our twelve tribes”.<sup>51</sup> James also addresses “the twelve tribes”.<sup>52</sup>

The thread of history has now passed through 25 different passages of the Bible, in ii different books. It covers a period of a thousand years. And a perfect harmony prevails.

Once more the question has to be faced: what caused this harmony? Did it “just happen”? Or is it evidence that one Master Mind was behind the writing of the Bible?

## 11

***It Can't All be Coincidence***

The trial had been a long one, and everyone concerned was glad that the end was in sight. Lord Justice Swingham was summing up the evidence for the prosecution.

“First, we have the evidence of several witnesses that the accused had for years shown a strong dislike for the victim of the crime, and on the evening before the murder he quarrelled violently with him. As he left the public bar of the Royal Oak, several witnesses heard him shout, ‘I’ll get even with you yet!’”

In a corner of the jury box a small elderly lady scowled at the judge. “Coincidence! Pure coincidence!” she muttered under her breath.

“Next we must note that the following morning, when the murder took place, the accused was unaccountably absent from work,” the judge continued. “He has been identified by six witnesses as the man who was seen running away from the victim’s house at 10.45 a.m., just after the sound of two shots was heard.”

“More coincidences,” muttered the old lady.

“Moreover the accused has admitted buying a double-barrelled shotgun at The Sportsman’s Emporium at 9.30 that morning. The wounds in the victim’s head are consistent with such a weapon having been fired. When seen running away, the accused was carrying a lengthy object in a sack. He disappeared in the direction of the River Thames, and the police have since recovered the accused’s shotgun from the bed of the river. The accused was not seen again until the next afternoon, when he was arrested at Rotherhithe Docks, trying to stow away on a Spanish ship bound for Venezuela.”

“Coincidences, all the lot of them,” muttered the elderly lady.  
“They don’t mean a thing to me.”

Another juror glared at her. “Coincidences be blowed!” he said.

**Facts to be Faced**

Now let’s look back over the previous nine chapters, and list the evidence that has to be faced. As you look at it, take care not to make the little old lady’s mistake. Some of the evidence on its own might be the result of coincidence. But it can’t *all* be coincidence.

Chapter 2 looked at some of the Bible’s many prophecies about the Jews. Their scattering all over the world, their long years of exile, their unpopularity, their frequent persecution, their continued existence despite attempts to exterminate them, and, at long last, their return to their homeland in an ungodly state—all these things were foretold in detail.

And it has all come to pass, exactly as the Bible said it would. The promise that those who blessed the Jews would be blessed, and those who cursed them would be cursed, has also been fulfilled many times.

Chapter 3 began with prophecies about two great cities, Babylon and Tyre. A very different doom was foretold for each city. In each case the Bible’s words came true, centuries after the prophecies were written.

This chapter went on to discuss Daniel's concentrated summary of the future history of the world. There were to be four, and only four, great "world empires". After that, the world would remain divided until the time of Christ's return to the earth. Historians (unbelievers included) agree that the Roman empire was the fourth world empire, and that there has never been another since.

Chapter 4 listed some of the prophecies made about Jesus, long before He was born. The exact place and the approximate date of His birth were prophesied. His altogether unique, righteous life was prophesied. So were His resurrection from the dead and His ascension to heaven.

But, most of all, the Old Testament foretold His crucifixion. Not just the fact, but many of the detailed circumstances of Calvary, were written in advance.

Chapter 5 showed that Jesus had an uncanny foreknowledge of the twentieth century. He foretold the worldwide preaching of God's Word; the return of the Jews to the land of Israel; and the insecurity, the loss of moral sense, the fear of the future, and the sense of impending doom that overshadow our world today.

The apostle Peter also foretold how our generation would scoff at the idea of the Second Coming, and described the particular scientific principle that educated men quote as their reason for scoffing. He also foresaw the kind of destruction (by fire) that another world war would bring upon our cities.

Chapter 6 described how the gospels portray Jesus, and argued that nobody in the world He lived in could have invented such a character. He did things and said things that no normal man of the age would have dreamed of saying or doing.

Consequently, if the gospel records are true, Jesus was a super-human Man, the Son of God. If they are fiction, then the gospel writers must themselves have been superhuman in their powers, to create such an extraordinary "uninventable" character as Jesus.

Chapter 7 examined the evidence that Jesus rose from the dead. According to the written testimony of many eyewitnesses, Jesus did rise from the grave. Those eyewitnesses were neither cheats nor simpletons. All the evidence points to the conclusion that they were honestly reporting the wonderful truth.

The birth and growth of Christianity in a world that did not want it, the sudden swing from the Jewish sabbath to the Christian Sunday, the bigoted apostle Paul's sudden conversion—all these facts need explaining. There is only one adequate explanation for them: that Christ rose from the dead.

Chapter 8 looked at the Law of Moses. We saw that it was thousands of years ahead of its time. In many respects the world has not caught up with it yet.

More than a thousand years before Christ it taught Christian love, love of neighbour and of stranger alike. In an evil idolatrous world it condemned idolatry, and insisted that there was only one God. While other nations worked their slaves to death, the Law made the Jews give both their slaves and themselves a day's rest every week.

The Law of Moses anticipated many modern discoveries: isolation of infectious diseases; the

principles of hygiene and sanitation; the avoidance of disease borne by unsuitable foodstuffs; the conservation of resources; the importance of a stable family life and sound education.

In Chapter 9 we looked at a more subtle kind of evidence. We saw that the Bible “rang true”. It reads like a true book, not a book full of falsehoods. The contrast between it and other ancient religious books is tremendous.

It makes no attempt to whitewash its heroes or to flatter its readers. Ordinary writers try to cover up the truth when it is unpleasant. But the Bible tells the honest truth, however painful that may be to its readers.

We also saw some examples of the “undesigned coincidences” that abound in the pages of the Bible. They are another mark of the simple truthfulness of its writers.

In Chapter 10 we saw how the sixty-six separate books in our Bible have a common theme. Threads of harmony join them all together, into one complete unit.

This harmony is far too remarkable to have occurred by accident. It is so deep-rooted that the authors could not possibly have created it on their own. This is evidence that one Master Mind must have guided the pens of all the forty authors of the Bible.

### **What Does This Prove?**

A diehard unbeliever would say that it doesn't “prove” anything. In one sense this is right. The truth of the Bible is not something that can be proved like a theorem in mathematics. But the guilt of a criminal cannot be proved mathematically either. Yet we still say that a criminal is “proved guilty” when there is so much evidence of his guilt that it is unreasonable to doubt it.

This book has marshalled some of the evidence that the Bible is what it claims to be. If you have digested this evidence it will stay with you for the rest of your life, whether you finally accept the Bible or not.

The evidence is not something that can be explained away. To put it all down to coincidence would be as silly as the behaviour of the little lady in the jury box. However you look at it, one fact is inescapable. There is a very great deal of evidence to support the Bible's claim to be a message from God.

This is where faith comes in.

Faith is not, as a cynic once said, “believing in something you know to be untrue”. Faith comes when *evidence* convinces you that something must be true. The New Testament defines it like this:

“Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”<sup>1</sup>

If you can accept the evidence put before you, and say, “Yes, I am convinced that there must be a God, that the Bible must be His Word, and that Jesus must be His Son”-if you can say that, then you have what the Bible calls faith.

But perhaps you cannot say that yet. Perhaps you can only go half way, and say something like this:

“Yes, the evidence is impressive. It does seem as if there might be something in it. But I don't

know. There are so many things to be said against the Bible, as well as for it.”

If that's how you feel you have no need to be depressed about it. Many other men and women have felt like that. We read of one such man who came to Jesus, asking for his epileptic child to be healed.

Jesus told him, “If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.”

The man replied, “Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief.”<sup>2</sup>

This sounds rather a contradictory statement to European ears. But it was evidently a Hebrew's way of saying, “Lord, I almost believe. I want to believe. But I find it hard to believe unreservedly. Lord, help me to believe with all my heart!”

Jesus apparently did help him, because there was a happy outcome. The man's prayer was answered; his child was healed.

### **How to Read On**

There is good practical advice in this story. Part Two of this book will try to deal with all the main obstacles to wholehearted belief in the Bible. Now you know the best way to tackle Part Two.

Read it with this prayer in your heart:

“Lord, I (want to) believe; help Thou mine unbelief!”

This will help you to have an attitude of respect for the Bible. It does not mean that you should suppress your reason. Far from it; God invites you to “gird up the loins of your mind”<sup>3</sup> (that is, to use every ounce of intelligence you possess) when you study the Bible.

What God wants us to suppress is our pride. We can come to the Bible, and to Part Two of this book, in two very different ways.

We can say: “The Bible is probably a man-made book. I shall feel free to treat it with contempt, to ridicule it, or to ignore it. I don't think the Bible has anything for me.” And we shall be right; the Bible will not have anything for us, if we approach it like that.

Or we can say: “The Bible might possibly be what it claims to be -a message from God Almighty. In case it is, I must treat it thoughtfully, humbly, respectfully, to see what I can learn from it.”

That way, you are sure to benefit. Even if you finally decide the Bible is not the Word of God, you will still learn more by adopting the humble approach.

And if-as I believe-the Bible is the Word of God, you will gain an infinitely greater blessing. For God has said:

“This is the man to whom I will look: he that is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at My Word.”<sup>4</sup>

## PART TWO

But What About. . .?

12

***Problems? Of Course!***

So now it's the unbelievers' turn to bat. We have looked at the main reasons why believers believe. Now we are going to look at the main difficulties which (so they say) prevent unbelievers from believing.

But before we begin, I want to make one thing quite clear. I am not the least bit embarrassed by these difficulties. Neither need you be. Every branch of human study bristles with problems. It would be very strange if the most profound subject of all—the study of the Word of the Almighty—were free from problems.

Of course there are problems connected with the Bible. It is exactly what you would expect.

**A Parallel with Science**

In my circle of acquaintances there are many science graduates who believe implicitly that the Bible is the Word of God. I could not name nearly so many arts graduates who believe the Bible. This may just be because I happen to know more science graduates. But in fact I think my experience is fairly general. Several friends from different universities have told me that there seem to be more Bible believers in their science departments than their arts departments.

One reason for this may be that science graduates are aware of the vast number of unsolved problems in science.

Take physics, for example. At school you are taught how Sir Isaac Newton laid the foundations of modern physics. You learn the various basic laws he propounded, and you accept them as absolute truth. You appreciate their beauty and simplicity, and you realise why Alexander Pope wrote:

“Nature and Nature’s laws lay hid in night  
God said, ‘Let Newton be!’ and all was light.”

Then you go to university, and are taught that Newton’s laws don’t explain everything. Problems arise that can only be explained by Einstein’s theories. These work in circumstances where Newton’s laws break down. But they are very much more complicated, and you realise why Sir John Squire capped Pope’s lines with:

“It did not last: the Devil howling, ‘Ho!

Let Einstein be!’ restored the status quo.”

Then you finish your university course and start doing research. Very soon you realise that there are lots and lots of problems you weren’t told about as an undergraduate. Einstein’s propositions nowadays look almost as incomplete as Newton’s did a half-century ago.

Strange problems have arisen in modern physics that were unheard of until recently. Is there such stuff as “antimatter”? If so, how much of it is there in the universe? Does it weigh less than nothing? Can atomic particles travel backwards through time?

These are only some of the problems that atomic physicists are debating today. It may take many years to answer them. And in answering them, many other unanswered questions are bound to arise.

And therefore . . . ? Therefore we can't trust atomic physics, because of all these unsolved problems? Obviously that does not follow. Atomic power stations work. That is proof enough that atomic physics is on the right lines. The existence of unanswered questions merely shows that many more exciting discoveries lie around the corner.

In just the same way, it would be absurd to dismiss the Bible just because there are some unsolved problems connected with it. Instead, we should study it eagerly, wondering what interesting discoveries lie in store for us.

The evidence of Part One of this book has shown that the claims of the Bible are solidly backed by evidence. As you read through Part Two you will see that very many of the problems connected with it have already been answered.

Every solved problem strengthens the case for the Bible. For if so many of the unbelievers' objections can be answered already, it is reasonable to suppose that all the rest could in time.

### **Another Parallel**

A small boy once had a conversation with an eminent university professor. Afterwards he told his father:

“I couldn't understand everything that man said.”

“That doesn't surprise me!” replied the father, with a smile.

Now the Bible tells us that Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God. He was called “the express image of God's Person”.<sup>1</sup> The words that He spoke were said to be the very words of God.<sup>2</sup>

Consequently the gap between Jesus and the rest of mankind was far, far greater than the gap between the professor and the small boy. Naturally there were many things about Jesus that the Jews could not understand. But they reacted most unreasonably. They used these problems as an excuse for their unbelief.

To begin with, none of the “best people” followed Him. “Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees (religious leaders) believed on Him?” was their snobbish excuse.<sup>3</sup>

Then again, He was such an unpredictable person. He never would behave as they thought the Son of God ought to behave.

When they wanted to honour Him and make Him king, He went away.<sup>4</sup> When a faithful disciple risked his own life to protect Jesus, instead of thanks he received a rebuke.<sup>5</sup>

On the cross, He was given a plain challenge to prove Himself: “If He be the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him!”<sup>6</sup> But He made no attempt to answer them.

It is easy for us to see the reason for His actions. We know now that “the cross must come

before the crown". But the Jews then did not. To them, Christ's behaviour sometimes did not make sense.

Also, His background seemed all wrong for a preacher. The gospels tell how men sneered at His lower-class origin,<sup>7</sup> His lack of education,<sup>8</sup> and the short interval between His parents' wedding and His birth.<sup>9</sup>

Looking back, we can see now that there was a simple solution to all these problems. But at the time the disciples were not able to answer them all. They could only say: "We believe and are sure that Thou art the Holy One of God."<sup>10</sup>

Imagine that someone had said to them:

"Why are you so sure of your beliefs, when there are so many problems connected with this man Jesus?"

They probably would have replied like this:

"Because there is so much positive evidence that He is the Son of God. That's what convinces us. We are not bothered about the problems. Of course there are some things we don't understand-yet. But we shall understand them, one day."

And they would have been right. Most of the problems did sort themselves out. The books of the New Testament give us the solution to them.

It is like that with the Bible itself. The positive evidence is very convincing. It is far too weighty to be dismissed by crying, "Yes, but what about the problems connected with the Bible?"

For in the first place there is the point made already, that we would expect to find problems connected with a Book given to mankind by God. If there were no problems, people would rightly say, "This is altogether too simple. It is kids' stuff. It can't possibly come from a Supreme Being."

Secondly, many of the so-called problems are not really problems at all. They are silly little objections raised by men who have never really studied the Book they condemn. And finally, as we shall see as we go on, most of the major problems can be answered quite satisfactorily.

So we are going to look at those problems that worry so many people, but we are not going to worry about them. It is the most natural thing in the world that they should be there.

The Bible believer is not afraid to look those problems squarely in the face. He knows that he is arguing from a position of strength. (He only wishes that the unbeliever was equally willing to face the facts!)

One last suggestion before you set out on Part Two. Don't keep saying to yourself: "But this can't possibly be right. Hardly anybody believes this, so it must be wrong."

We shall see the answer to that objection, too, before we've finished.

### ***Can We Trust the Experts?***

Of course we can trust the experts. We have to. Nowadays we have no choice. This is the age of the experts.

I cannot fly an aeroplane. Yet I travel by air dozens of times every year. I fasten my seat belt and then relax in my seat, trusting the pilot to do his job properly.

In his turn the pilot has to trust lots of other experts, upon whom his own safety depends. Fifty years ago, pilots took a pride in flying by the seat of their pants, as they called it. They meant that they depended entirely on the feel of the plane, and the sight of their own two eyes. They were even their own mechanics and checked their flimsy craft for airworthiness before taking off.

Those days are gone for ever. Nowadays it takes a large team of experts to design and build an aircraft. Aerodynamicists, electronics engineers, stress analysts, and hosts of other narrow specialists all work together. None of them can do the jobs of the others. They all trust their colleagues to do their own jobs properly.

Before the plane takes off one set of experts is needed to service the engines, another the hydraulics Systems, another the radar equipment. Even in the air the pilot is not the master of his own aircraft. He obeys the instructions of a whole army of air traffic controllers whom he trusts to keep him free from mid-air collisions, and takes advice from weather forecasters.

All these experts do their jobs well. They are trustworthy. They have to be. Otherwise planes would come crashing down in all directions like roofing tiles in a hurricane, and the airlines would never get any passengers.

Even if you never go by air, you can't live in the modern world without relying on experts. You may take for granted services like water supply, gas, electricity, telephones, television and transport. But they all depend on experts to keep them functioning. Even the food we eat and the medicines we take might poison us unless lots of experts in the food and drugs industries and the Public Health Departments were reliable.

In the same way, I could never have written this book without trusting a great many experts. Every quotation of the Bible in English accepts the work of many scholars. Some of them have compared large numbers of ancient Hebrew and Greek manuscripts of the Bible to produce the best possible Hebrew and Greek texts, and other scholars have translated these into English. I have been forced to quote experts in history, archaeology, biology, geology, anthropology and many other fields where I have no expert knowledge of my own.

### **Experts are Only Human**

Without a doubt it is very useful to have a world full of experts. But it also brings some very real dangers. It is easy to forget that experts are just as human as the rest of us. But they are. And in their common humanity lies a great danger.

I am not merely referring to the fact that even experts can make mistakes. There is a more serious danger than this. Lord Acton put his finger upon a deep-rooted characteristic of human

nature, when he said:

“Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.”<sup>1</sup>

He was thinking mainly of political power. But it is true of every kind of power. Experts today wield a kind of intellectual power over the man in the street. And there is every sign that they are in danger of being corrupted by that power.

The whole purpose of this chapter is to sound a very necessary warning. *Don't let the experts pull the wool over your eyes.* In many respects your opinion may be worth as much as theirs—even in some matters where they might reasonably claim to know better than you.

Perhaps you think that this is a very negative matter with which to occupy a whole chapter. If so, it may help to look at it this way. When good King Josiah came to the throne of Israel he found Jerusalem full of idols. Before he could begin to restore the true worship of Jehovah, he had first to destroy all those idols.<sup>2</sup>

“The experts” are the false gods of our age. They pretend to have an authority, a near-infallibility, that they do not possess. And most people are taken in by them.

For example: “Fornication won't hurt you—it will do you good!”, say many psychologists. (With my own ears I once heard a psychiatrist proclaiming this.) Millions of people have lapped up this teaching, and now the foundations of family stability are tottering throughout the western world.

Worse still, “the experts” have undermined people's faith in the Bible. If you doubt this, take any unbeliever you happen to know, and ask him exactly why he does not believe the Bible. Press him hard. Don't let him evade the issue. Keep on until he states his real reasons.

Will he say, “Because I have made a very careful study of the Bible, and have proved it to be quite inaccurate.”? Will he? Not likely!

It is almost certain that, if he is honest, his real reasons will begin like this: “Because *they say* that . .

“They say.” They. The experts. He has a vague notion that “the scientists” say the Bible is unscientific, “the historians” say the Bible is historically inaccurate, and “the leaders of religion” say that the Bible is not what it makes out to be.

And that's enough for him. If “they” condemn the Bible, why should he look any further? They are the experts. They are bound to be right. The Bible is dead—long live the experts! Thus our friend justifies his unbelief.

So before we can safely begin to look at the objections raised against the Bible, we must first take a look at the people who raise them. Who are “they”? Are they really as wise as they like us to think? Are we really being foolish if we dare to question the experts' conclusions?

### **A New Look at the *Experts***

To see the matter in perspective it is necessary to note a number of points that are often overlooked. Because of their importance I shall list these points first, and then go back and expand them.

- (1) Experts deal with both facts and opinions.
- (2) Experts in some fields are much more reliable than experts in other fields.

- (3) Experts disagree enormously among themselves.
- (4) Experts in every field are very unreliable when they speculate about the future, or (under some circumstances) the past.
- (5) A surprisingly large number of experts have been caught deliberately deceiving the public.
- (6) Experts have very frequently been led astray when their emotions have become involved.
- (7) Experts have a regrettable tendency to exaggerate their own importance, and to persuade the public that they know more than they really do.
- (8) Non-specialists very often can and do make better decisions than experts, once the experts have stated the facts requiring a decision.

### **(1) Facts and Opinions**

A philosopher might not agree that experts deal with both facts and opinions. He might say that there are no such things as facts, only opinions of differing degrees of probability.

For practical purposes, however, the distinction between facts and opinions will serve us quite well, so long as we remember that there is no sharp line of distinction between the two. Now and again we might meet a borderline statement, one that Mr. A would call a fact and Mr. B would call an opinion. But most statements can safely be classified as one or the other.

For example, suppose that in 1968 you had asked a chemist, "If I spray my kitchen with DDT, will it keep the flies down?" He would have answered, "Yes". That would have been a fact.

If you had gone on and asked, "But is DDT harmful to man?" he would probably have replied, "No." That would have been an opinion. *And it would have been wrong.* Yet if you had disagreed with him, he would probably have thought you were a cheeky ignoramus.

This illustrates the first pitfall we must avoid. Because they are generally right on their facts, the experts nearly always attach too much weight to their opinions. And so does a gullible public.

### **(2) Experts in Different Fields**

Whatever the man in the street may think, many intellectuals are well aware of the unreliability of experts. For example, the Australian philosopher Alan Wood has stated:

"Subjects should be arranged in a kind of hierarchy-for instance, Mathematics, Physics, Biology, Economics, Politics, Psychology-in which experts are more and more likely to be wrong."<sup>3</sup>

He does not state where his own subject, philosophy, comes in the pecking order. But he obviously has no illusions about philosophy, because he reveals in the same book that Bertrand Russell, the most famous philosopher of the century, said when he was in his late seventies:

"...philosophy is nonsense. I am now left regretting my ill-spent youth. . . . nine-tenths of what is regarded as philosophy is humbug."<sup>4</sup>

When I first heard those words quoted, I felt sure that they must have been taken out of context, so as to misrepresent Russell's views. So I obtained the book, only to find that Russell

undoubtedly did mean what those words imply—that most of the subject that had occupied his great brain for so long was a load of old rubbish.

Wood's list of subjects is well chosen. Mathematics comes top, because provided that a careful mathematician starts with the right assumptions he is almost bound to arrive at the right conclusion. Physics is on rather more shaky ground, because it is based on a mixture of experiment, mathematics and deduction. Experiments can go wrong, and deductions can be false.

Biology is one rung further down the ladder. This is because living things are vastly more complex than atoms and molecules. Biological experiments are therefore much more likely to give misleading answers than experiments in physics.

Then come economics, politics and psychology. These all deal with the behaviour of that highly unpredictable creature, Man. Lots and lots of scope for making mistakes here!

Unfortunately the experts in the high-mistake-rate subjects (like biology and psychology) try to bask in the reflected glory of the low-mistake-rate subjects (like mathematics). They say, for instance, "We've installed a big computer in our laboratory, so we shan't make nearly so many mistakes in future." In fact the possession of a computer would not make the slightest difference to the accuracy of their conclusions. It would merely enable them to turn Out their dubious results a lot faster than before.

### **(3) Disagreements Among Experts**

In 1954 I took a first-aid course at the laboratory where I work. We used the latest textbook, published only a few months before. This is how it told us to treat a shocked patient:

"The application of warmth is the first of the measures to be applied to a shocked patient. Cover the patient with blankets; place hot-water bottles round him..."<sup>5</sup>

Some years later I enrolled in a refresher course. Again the latest textbook (published in 1965) was used. But this time the advice on treatment for shock began with a warning in heavy black type:

"WARNING: DO NOT OVERHEAT A SHOCKED PATIENT. Heat causes the superficial blood vessels to dilate and so increase their capacity. The amount of circulating blood thus becomes even more inadequate for the needs of the body."<sup>6</sup>

Thus in 1954 the experts said, "Keep 'em warm!"; in 1965 they said, "Keep 'em cool!" But it would be naive to imagine that at some fixed date between 1954 and 1965 the whole medical profession changed its views overnight. There must have been a period of controversy, while the Coolists gradually conquered the Warmists.

Similar differences of opinion among experts are going on all the time. Biologists argue bitterly about whether certain drugs and pesticides should be banned. Educationists disagree violently about comprehensive education and corporal punishment. Space scientists cannot agree whether men or machines should be used to explore the moon. The list of disagreements could go on until it filled this book.

The lesson is clear. Very often, "The experts say . . ." means nothing more than, "The opinion of the side that happens to be winning at the moment is . . ."

#### (4) When Experts Speculate about the Future or the Past

Physicists come near the top of Alan Wood's reliability league. Yet even physicists can go hopelessly astray when they try to predict the future. A scientific journal in 1968 published an article, "How Fallible Can you Get?"<sup>7</sup> This showed how wrong physicists had been about the future of atomic power.

Lord Rutherford, perhaps the greatest atomic physicist of the early twentieth century, was convinced that there never would be any practical application of atomic research. Around 1950, leading atomic scientists in France, Russia and America all declared that atomic power stations would not become commercial propositions until the end of the century.

What happened, to make these wise men such false prophets? Simply this: they took the present as a guide to the future. Unfortunately for them some completely unforeseen events occurred, which made the future very different from what they had envisaged.

There are two lessons in this. The first is obvious: it is very dangerous to use the present to predict the future.

The second lesson is much less obvious, but just as true: *it is equally risky to assume that the present is a sure guide to the past.* Unknown events in days gone by can upset a scientist's deductions about the past, just as surely as an unforeseen event in days to come can upset his predictions.

This is a very important lesson indeed. Experts of all sorts-astronomers, geologists, biologists, anthropologists, physicists and others-often make sweeping statements about the past. Some of these statements, if true, would make nonsense of the Bible. It is therefore most necessary to remember two things:

- (a) They are statements of opinion, not fact.
- (b) They are always based upon the very shaky assumption that no unknown events have occurred to upset their deductions.

#### (5) Experts Who Cheat

The popular conception of a scientist is of a man in a pure white coat with a pure white conscience. He could no more tell a lie than a computer could make a mistake. Deceive the public? No, not he!

Consequently, when a politician makes a promise everybody knows to take it with a grain of salt; but if a scientist states something, everybody accepts it as truth, perfect truth. But honest scientists have no desire to be set on a pedestal like this. We know that we cannot live up to it.

Recently the editor of one of the world's leading scientific journals warned the public:

"There is no evidence that scientists always tell the truth, and the chances are that they are only marginally more honest than, say, politicians."<sup>8</sup>

Another well known scientific journal published an article by Dennis Rosen of London University on scientific frauds.<sup>9</sup> After dealing with some famous frauds, like the Piltdown Man, Rosen considered the problem of widespread scientific cheating. He suggested that up to five per cent of scientific papers submitted for publication contain material that the authors know to be

false. Fortunately editors are good at spotting frauds, and only a minority of these deceitful papers get published.

It would be wrong to make too much of this. Scientists are no less truthful than their non-scientific colleagues. But it is as well to remember that they are no more truthful than the average man, either. And the same applies to every other kind of expert.

## **(6) What Emotional Pressure Can Do**

Although only a small minority of scientists would deliberately deceive others, a much larger number are liable to deceive themselves when under emotional pressure. There is plenty of proof that this is so. Here are three examples.

Well into the 1960s, when the evidence that smoking caused lung cancer was absolutely overwhelming, quite a few research scientists were still fighting a desperate rearguard action. Even when it looked a hopeless task, they kept on trying to find some other explanation for the evidence.

Why did they waste their time and energy in this way? In most cases because their scientific judgement was warped by emotional pressures. Some of them had well paid jobs with tobacco companies. Some were young men addicted to smoking who did not want to give it up. Others had been heavy smokers for many years, and were pathetic ally trying to reassure themselves that they were not in danger of death.

A second example comes from Russia. As the translator of a Russian book on the Lysenko affair<sup>10</sup> has said in his foreword:

“The story of Soviet genetics in the period 1937-1964 is, perhaps, the most bizarre chapter in the history of modern science.”

Briefly, the story goes like this. Lysenko was an ambitious young Russian with very little scientific knowledge but a flair for politics. By mixing the two he became one of Stalin's favourites. In 1937 Stalin gave him supreme control of all research in agriculture and biology in the Soviet Union, and he hung on to this position for twenty-seven years. The results were disastrous for Russia. Lysenko directed agricultural research along so many unscientific paths that Russian agriculture practically stood still, or even slipped backwards, for a quarter of a century.

Worse still, he outlawed the whole modern science known as genetics. This science is concerned with the way in which characteristics are passed from parents to offspring (in both the animal and the vegetable kingdoms) by invisibly small objects known as “genes”. By 1937 there was already a great deal of experimental evidence that genes existed, although nobody had ever seen one. In 1953 Watson and Crick in England showed what genes were evidently made of, and in 1958 were awarded a Nobel prize for their discovery.

All through this period Lysenko laid down the law to Russian biologists: “There are no such things as genes. They are a capitalist myth. Heredity works on entirely different principles. Toe the line ~ go to jail!”

Some strong-minded scientists, including Vavilov, one of the greatest agriculturists in history,

went to prison and died there. A few others formed a kind of “scientific underground”. But the great majority of Soviet biologists and agriculturists were swept along by the tide, and accepted Lysenko’s crazy ideas. Textbooks were rewritten, and research programmes into the most ridiculous subjects were set up.

Three hundred higher degrees were granted for research into “vegetative hybridisation by grafting” ‘-something that has long been known to be impossible.’<sup>11</sup> A Stalin Prize of 200,000 roubles was awarded to a lady called Lepeshinskaya, for (allegedly) discovering how to create living animal cells out of vegetable cells and vice versa!<sup>12</sup>

It was the heyday of quacks and crackpots, but the dark night of Soviet biology. And all this at a time when in some other fields (astronautics, for instance) Soviet science was leading the world.

The most alarming feature of the story is the way in which the great majority of Soviet biologists were genuinely deceived. In 1964 Lysenko was at last sacked, and for one year (1965-66) biology teaching was suspended in all Russian schools while textbooks were rewritten. Yet in 1966 Medvedev (the writer of the Russian book about Lysenko’s activities) lamented that so many Soviet scientists had been brainwashed for so many years that Lysenko still had many supporters.<sup>13</sup>

It is clear from this story that scientists-whole regiments of scientists-can be led hopelessly astray. In the early years Lysenko suppressed his opponents by force. But afterwards a whole new generation of Soviet biologists grew up, genuinely believing that Lysenko was right. They were taught that way at school and college, and hardly any of them questioned it.

In his concluding chapter Medvedev makes two very wise observations:

“The false doctrine of Lysenko is by no means an isolated instance. . . . *Many theoretical branches of science* and the well. known and flourishing system of homeopathy fall, no doubt, into the category of false doctrine.”<sup>14</sup>

“*Monopoly in science* by one or another false doctrine, *or even by one scientific trend*, is an external symptom of *some deep-seated sickness of a society*.”<sup>15</sup> (The italics are mine.)

These vigorous warnings by Medvedev are a fitting introduction to the third and last example. A friend of mine is a professor who holds a science chair in a famous British university. Like a number of my scientist friends he rejects the Darwinian theory of evolution as a piece of guesswork based on inadequate evidence.

One day in 1968 I went to see him, and outlined a novel programme of research that would fall right inside the scope of his department. If successful it would have thrown new light on some aspects of evolutionary theory, and would probably have exposed some important weaknesses in the Darwinists’ case. I suggested that he might like to set a Ph.D. student to work upon it. (A Ph.D. student is a young graduate who stays on at university for an extra three or four years doing research, to gain a doctorate.)

He shook his head sadly. “I couldn’t possibly do that.”

“Why not? Don’t you like the suggestion?”

“Yes, I do. I think it’s a good idea, and if I have time I’d like to work on it myself. But I wouldn’t dare to let a student work on it.”

This mystified me. “Why not a student?” I asked.

“You obviously have no idea of the prejudice that exists in British universities. No matter how brilliant the research, or how sound the conclusions, a research thesis exposing the weaknesses of Darwinism would never get a fair hearing. The scales would be so heavily weighted against him that the poor student would be most unlikely to get his doctorate.”

What did Medvedev say? “Monopoly . . . by one scientific trend is an external symptom of some deep-seated sickness of a society.”

Hmmm.

### **(7) Experts Exaggerate Their Importance**

Every so often some far-sighted expert tries to warn the public. In 1950 an American scientist, Anthony Standen, published his best-selling book, *Science is a Sacred Cow*. But by 1969 his warning had been forgotten, and another scientist, David Horrobin, had to say it all over again in his book, *Science is God*.<sup>16</sup>

Despite the rather flamboyant title, there is nothing blasphemous about the book. Horrobin's title means that modern man has turned science into a false god, and given it far more respect than it deserves.

Horrobin, like Standen before him, tries to cut science down to size. He is a professor of medical physiology, and is particularly severe about his own branch of science. He lifts the lid off, and shows the layman what lies underneath all the pronouncements of the experts. Here are a few quotations from his book:

“The history of science is littered with so-called facts which were later found not to be facts at all.... Anyone who has ever worked in a laboratory, particularly a biological laboratory, is fully aware of the vulnerability of experimental fact. Experiments are always going wrong..”<sup>17</sup>

“The scientific study of man is a myth, perhaps the most dangerous of all the myths of modern civilisation. Ultimately the psychologist, the psychiatrist, the sociologist must each confess that his work must be prefaced by ‘I believe’ and not by ‘I have proved scientifically’. The intellectual basis for what the scientist says of man is no stronger than that for what the theologian says. *By means of a gigantic confidence trick, by pretending that the study of man is science) by hanging on the coat tails of so lid) successful, reliable physics and engineering, an army of atheists and agnostics has forced many theologians to turn and flee.*”<sup>18</sup>

“In a manner of which any unthinking nineteenth-century bishop would have approved, many scientists are defending with untoward vigour positions which seem to me and probably to most people to be untenable.”<sup>19</sup>

“Five equally clever men may have access to precisely the same information, and yet may express five different opinions about a particular issue. Their answers depend more on their preconceived ideas than on the facts available.”<sup>20</sup>

“Science is the modern god.... Twentieth-century scientists, like nineteenth-century theologians, make the wildest claims on behalf of their god.... Twentieth-century charlatans of a myriad varieties offer their panaceas for society and attempt to mislead the people by calling their misbegotten ideas scientific. *And bewildered twentieth-century common men have a crude*

*faith in their god which they do not care to have questioned too closely...*<sup>21</sup> (The italics are mine throughout.)

Very well. We have been warned. The experts (scientists in particular) thrust their opinions at us with the zeal of false prophets. And ordinary people lap it up, like devoted worshippers of some false god.

Compare that last quotation from Horrobin with some words from the Old Testament, written about 2,500 years ago:

“A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land. The prophets prophesy falsely and the priests bear rule by their means, *and My people love to have it so*”<sup>22</sup>

Human nature doesn't change much, does it? People always have liked to listen to the voice of “Authority”. People positively love to be led astray by false prophets and dogmatising experts. That is the way we are all made.

Yes, we have been warned!

### **(8) You Can Decide For Yourself**

Who decides whether a man accused of murder is guilty? A panel of legal experts? Certainly not. The legal experts set out all the evidence, and then a jury of ordinary men and women-folk like you and me-make the vital decision.

Who decides whether Britain shall invest hundreds of millions of pounds in developing a proposed new aircraft? A group of aircraft engineers? Certainly not. The decision is made by civil servants and politicians who couldn't tell a jet engine from a brass trumpet except by its size.

Who decides whether to ban certain chemicals from foodstuffs, or to limit the use of x-rays in hospitals? Again it is not the chemists or the doctors, but the civil servants and politicians that decide.

This is the one redeeming feature in the present situation. We are not yet governed by the experts. Top decisions are still made by non-specialists, who listen to their expert advisers, weigh the evidence, and then reach a conclusion.

This is enough to show that you do not have to be an expert to make up your mind about some important subject. Like a jury, like a civil servant, you are well able to consider the evidence and decide for yourself.

So don't be overawed by “the experts” as you read on. Do not let anybody bluff you into thinking that the majority view is the only view, or that those who accept the minority viewpoint taken in this book are feeble-minded.

Weigh up the evidence for and against the Bible as honestly as you can. Then make up your own mind, without worrying about what “they” say.

Remember that all through history, in every branch of knowledge, minority opinions have often proved right in the long run.

**All-or Nothing**

About twenty years ago I went to a big conference at London University. The theme was "Evolution and Religion", and the opening address was given by a world-famous theologian.

His subject was "Evolution and Theology". He spent his time tearing the first three chapters of the Bible to pieces. According to him there never was any such place as the Garden of Eden, nor any such people as Adam and Eve. What "the experts" said was sacred; and therefore what Genesis said was false. And so, he concluded triumphantly, we must now regard Genesis as a collection of myths and legends.

Among the eminent people present was one of Britain's best-known scientists, the late J. B. S. Haldane. There was also a young science student that nobody had ever heard of.

As soon as the meeting was thrown open to discussion, the young student stood up and quoted the following Bible passages:

"Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as *in Adam* all die, even so *in Christ* shall all be made alive."<sup>1</sup>

"As by *one man* sin entered into the world and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men - . . . death reigned *from Adam* to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the likeness of *Adam's transgression*... For if by *one man's offence* death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness *shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ*"<sup>2</sup>

"I should like to ask the speaker," he said, "how he thinks we ought to regard the New Testament's teaching about salvation? Those two passages (and others) show that Paul regarded Adam as a real man who brought sin and death into the world, and Jesus Christ as another real man who brought back righteousness and a way of eternal life.

"If Paul was mistaken about the very foundation of his teaching, how can we rely upon anything he wrote about salvation? If one of Paul's two key men-Adam-was a myth, how can we be sure that the other key man-Jesus-wasn't a myth also?"

The world-famous theologian looked most uncomfortable. He got up, muttered something about this being too big an issue to deal with in the time at his disposal, and sat down again.

He looked even more uncomfortable when the atheist J. B. S. Haldane began to rub salt in his wounds.

"I should like to underline the commonsense remarks made by this young man," said Professor Haldane. "It is high time that orthodox theologians like our speaker today took a critical look at themselves. They are struggling to defend an absurd, impossible position.

"They are trying to adopt a compromise in circumstances where no compromise is possible. The Bible claims, from beginning to end, to be the inspired, infallible, Word of God. Either this claim is true, or it is false. There is no half-way position.

"If it is false (as I believe) then there is no foundation for Christianity at all. If it is true (as this young man believes) then Christians are obliged to accept *all* the Bible. There just isn't any

logical alternative.”

There was a hush for a few moments as the audience pondered the great scientist's words.

## No Compromise

Haldane was right, of course. There are some situations where compromise is a good thing, and some situations where compromise just doesn't make sense.

Suppose that you say to the filling station attendant who has just filled your tank, “Six gallons at thirty-six and a half, that's two pounds nineteen, isn't it?” and he replies, “Afraid not, Sir, two twenty-nine, please.”

Do you say, “All right, let's compromise; call it two twenty-five”?

Of course you don't. Compromise is absurd in a situation like that. You know that there is only one right answer-your answer-and you stick out for it.

In the same way, as Haldane's penetrating intellect saw so clearly, there is only one right answer for the Christian.

Jesus Christ taught His followers to call Him “Master”.<sup>3</sup> The word He used did not mean “boss”; it meant “schoolmaster”. He called His followers “disciples”—a word that meant “students”. He made it quite clear what the relationship between Him and us should be:

“The disciple (student) is not above his Master (teacher) ... And why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?”<sup>4</sup>

The lesson is quite clear. Our place is to sit at the feet of Jesus and learn, as Mary did.<sup>5</sup> If we have the nerve to set ourselves up as judges over Jesus and try to decide where He went wrong, then we are courting disaster.

Yet this is just what so many modern theologians do, when they say that the Bible is a mixture of truth and error. For Jesus taught just the opposite.

When Jesus lived on earth about four-fifths of our Bible was already written. We now call this “the Old Testament”, but in those days the Jews called it “the Scripture”, or “that which is written”, or “the Law”, or “the Law and the prophets”, or “Moses and the prophets”.

Jesus used the same terms, and this is what He said about it:

“The Scripture cannot be broken.”<sup>6</sup>

“It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away, than for one tittle of the Law to fail.”<sup>7</sup> (A tittle is a small stroke on a Hebrew letter, rather like the crossing of our letter t.)

“Had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me, for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?”<sup>8</sup>

“They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them . . . If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.”<sup>9</sup>

## Actions Speak Louder than Words

Jesus was a preacher who lived up to His own message. He not only said that the Old Testament was true and authoritative; He showed by the way He used it that He really believed it to be so.

Look at the way Jesus conquered temptation. Three times the tempter came to Jesus in the wilderness, and three times Jesus defeated him. Each time He used the same method. "It is written ...", He said, quoting an Old Testament passage that disposed of the temptation.<sup>10</sup>

The tempter did not stop to argue. He did not say to Jesus, "Yes, but that verse wasn't really written by Moses. It was only attributed to him by the scribe who wrote it, hundreds of years after Moses was dead." It was well known that Jesus accepted the first five books of the Bible as the Word of God given by Moses.<sup>11</sup> To Jesus, if something was "written", that settled the matter.

Similarly, Jesus frequently silenced the Pharisees and Sadducees by appealing to Scripture. "Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures",<sup>12</sup> was His complaint.

Six times in Matthew's gospel alone He asked a question with the devastating opening: "Have ye not read ...?" or, "Did ye never read ...?"<sup>13</sup> Each time the introductory words were followed by a quotation, one from Genesis, one from Exodus, one from 1 Samuel, one from Numbers, and two from the Psalms. Each time He appears to have rendered His opponents speechless.

Many times He settled disputes once and for all by quoting Scripture. When Jesus said to His religious opponents, "It is written . . .", or, "What is written . . .", as He did on at least six occasions,<sup>14</sup> that always finished the argument.

Jesus could, of course, have relied on His own authority to settle disputes. He claimed that His own words were the words of God.<sup>15</sup> Often He did speak on His own authority, with a "Verily, I say unto you".<sup>16</sup>

But when a really big issue arose-resisting the tempter, or halting the attacks of the Pharisees and Sadducees-Jesus generally appealed to Scripture. To Him this was the ultimate authority. This was absolute Truth. There could be no gainsaying Scripture.

### **Route Map to the Cross**

Jesus did not drift through life like most of us, taking each emergency as it comes. From the beginning He knew exactly where He was going: to the Cross. During the last part of His mortal life He made this clear to His disciples:

"From that time forth began Jesus to show unto His disciples how that He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day."<sup>17</sup>

This road to the Cross was not easy to walk. It took all His iron determination to follow it to the end. An hour or two before His arrest He had one last chance to run away, and the temptation to escape was enormous.

Luke tells us how He prayed for strength to go through with it. He was in "an agony", and "His sweat was as it were great drops of blood, falling down to the ground."<sup>18</sup> Come what may, He knew that He must go forward. He expressed His determination to do so in the words: "Father. . . not My will, but Thine, be done."<sup>19</sup>

With this resolve to conquer His own human feelings and to do God's will, He went to a terrible death.

But how did He know that it was God's will for Him to die by slow torture? He would have had to be very, very sure that it was necessary before He could go willingly to the horrors ahead of Him.

Yet He *was* sure that it was God's will. He had known all along what He must do. Time and again He had told His disciples how He knew. Here are four examples, one from each gospel:

“And He took unto Him the twelve and said unto them, ‘Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and *all things that are written by the prophets* concerning the Son of Man shall be accomplished. For he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on. And they shall scourge Him and put Him to death; and the third day He shall rise again.”<sup>20</sup>

“The Son of Man goeth as *it is written of Him*; but woe unto that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed!”<sup>21</sup>

“He answered and told them...how *it is written* of the Son of Man that He must suffer many things and be set at nought.”<sup>22</sup>

“Search the Scriptures - . . . they are *they which testify of Me*.”<sup>23</sup> Had there been no crucified Saviour there would have been no Christianity. And the Saviour would never have been crucified unless He had believed-implicitly-that the Old Testament revealed exactly what sufferings He must endure. What sort of disciples (the word means “pupils”, remember) of His should we be, if we thought that He was sadly mistaken in His view of the Old Testament?

Yet there are, unhappily, many would-be “pupils” of His who do think Him mistaken. They have even invented a complicated theological explanation for His “mistakes”, and have given it a Greek name<sup>24</sup> which makes it sound much more clever than it really is. But even this so-called explanation only covers the period of Christ's mortal life; those who teach it admit that the Son of God could make no mistakes after He rose from the dead to glorious immortality.

And consequently it is a waste of words for them to argue that Jesus could hold wrong notions while He was still a mortal man. Because Jesus held exactly the same views after His resurrection as before it.

The resurrected Jesus, who could say, “All power is given unto Me, in heaven and in earth”,<sup>25</sup> could also say:

“O fools, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets He expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself - ..All things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the Psalms, concerning Me.”<sup>26</sup>

“Fools,” the resurrected Jesus called them, because they did not believe *all* that was written in the Old Testament. Fools! You can't help feeling sorry for those poor disciples. It must have been a very humiliating experience, being called fools by the Son of God.

## Claims of the Old Testament

It is easy to see why Jesus regarded the Old Testament in the way He did. He took it at its face value. Time after time the Old Testament claims to be an authoritative message from God to men.

Jesus accepted that claim. Commonsense says that one can either accept the claim, or reject it altogether. There is no sensible middle course.

According to one writer,<sup>27</sup> the Old Testament makes this claim in 3,808 places-an average of about four per page. Even if this is an overestimate the number must run into thousands.

The prophets are particularly rich in such claims. For example, Haggai says, "Came the word of the Lord by Haggai" in his first verse, and again in his third verse, while in the second verse he says, "Thus speaketh the Lord". Haggai uses expressions like this more than twenty times, in a book that occupies only two pages in the average Bible.

Even the legal code given to the nation of Israel (the Law of Moses) is spattered with phrases like "Moses wrote all the words of the Lord", and "The Lord spake unto Moses".<sup>28</sup> Similar phrases are less common in the historical books, but they still occur many times. For example:

"The Lord spake unto Joshua",<sup>29</sup> "Thus said the Lord",<sup>30</sup> "The Lord revealed Himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the Lord".<sup>31</sup>

The writers of the Old Testament books not only tell us that God spoke to them, or through them. Sometimes they go into more detail, and give us a glimpse of what it was like to be the mouthpiece of God.

Thus:

*David:* "The spirit of the Lord spake by me, and His word was in my tongue."<sup>32</sup>

*Isaiah:* "He laid it (a burning coal from a heavenly altar) upon my mouth, and said, 'Lo, this hath touched thy lips, and thine iniquity is taken away and thy sin purged.' Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' Then said I, 'Here am I, send me.' And He said, 'Go, and tell this people ...'"<sup>33</sup>

*Jeremiah:* "Then said I, 'Ah, Lord God! Behold, I cannot speak, for I am a child.' But the Lord said unto me, 'Say not, "I am a child", for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak.' . . . Then the Lord put forth His hand and touched my mouth, and the Lord said unto me, 'Behold, I have put My words in thy mouth' . . . (much later) Then I said, 'I will not make mention of Him, nor speak any more in His name.' But His word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not contain."<sup>34</sup>

As you might expect, the apostles of Jesus took exactly the same line about the Old Testament as their Master. They supported it right up to the hilt. Here are five examples:

"Lord, Thou art God... who by the mouth of Thy servant David hast said . . ."<sup>35</sup>

"The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet. . ."<sup>36</sup>

"In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets."<sup>37</sup>

"So worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the prophets."<sup>38</sup>

“I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come.”<sup>39</sup>

Notice what is implied in those first three quotations. (1) What David (who wrote many of the Psalms) said, God said. (2) What is written in the Book of Isaiah is what God's Holy Spirit said. (3) The words of the prophets were really spoken by God.

No wonder that in the last two quotations Paul said he believed all that was in the Old Testament, and preached nothing else!

### Claims of the New Testament

Of course, there are two possibilities about these claims made in the Bible. They may be true, or they may be false. Later on we shall have to try and decide which. For the present, however, let us leave it as an open question. It will be sufficient in this chapter to concentrate on trying to understand just what those claims are. According to the writers of the New Testament, God spoke through them, too. John says that Jesus promised to use His apostles in that way:

“Howbeit, when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth...”<sup>40</sup>

“The Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, he shall teach you all things, and *bring all things to your remembrance) whatsoever I have said unto you.*”<sup>41</sup>

So Matthew, Mark, Luke and John would not have to rely on a hazy recollection of what Jesus had said. When they wrote their four gospels the Holy Spirit would cause them to recall the exact teaching of the Master. Or so, at least, John's gospel said.

Peter and Paul also claimed repeatedly that they were being moved to preach and write God's words. Here are two examples from each:

*Peter:* “Those [the apostles] who preached the good news to you *through the Holy Spirit* sent from heaven.”<sup>42</sup>

“Be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets [the Old Testament], and *the commandment of the Lord P and Saviour through your apostles* [the New Testament].”<sup>43</sup>

*Paul:* “When ye received the Word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but, as it *is in truth, the Word of God.*”<sup>44</sup>

“But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but *it came to me through revelation of Jesus Christ.*”<sup>45</sup>

Evidently the apostles believed that they were being used by God just like His prophets of old. First, God's prophets were moved by God's Spirit to speak His words. Then the Spirit caused them to write down God's words, and thus create the Old Testament. Similarly the apostles were first caused by God's Spirit to preach His words. Later, the Spirit made them write God's words, and so produce the New Testament. Or so the apostles claimed.

### Inspiration

Most people would agree that if there is a God, He must be able to do things on earth invisibly.

As Cowper's well-known hymn puts it:

“God moves in a mysterious way  
His wonders to perform.”

The Bible has a name for the invisible work of God on earth. It calls it the doings of “the Spirit of God”, or “the Holy Spirit”, or for short, just “the Spirit”.

This is a good name for it, because it is the translation of Hebrew and Greek words meaning “wind”. In this age of weather forecasts we understand what the wind is. But in the ancient world wind was something strange, mysterious, powerful. It made men think of the invisible power of God working on earth.

It is fitting, therefore, that most of God's great miracles were said to be performed by His Spirit. So was the giving of His Word—which was, of course, a kind of miracle. When men spoke or wrote the Word of God, it was the Spirit that moved them. Again and again in the Old Testament it says that the Spirit of the Lord came upon so-and-so, and he prophesied.

When the Old Testament was practically complete, a thousand years or so after Moses had begun it, another prophet, Nehemiah, summed up the situation:

“Thou [God] gavest also Thy good Spirit to instruct them [Israel] . . . Many years didst Thou forbear them, and testified against them *by Thy Spirit in Thy prophets...* But we have done wickedly, neither have our kings, our princes, our priests or our fathers kept Thy Law.”<sup>46</sup>

As the apostle Peter put it, several hundred years later still:

“No prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, because *no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man) but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.*”<sup>47</sup>

In the same way, according to the verses quoted earlier in this chapter, the New Testament also was written by men who were moved by the Holy Spirit. As Jesus told them before they began, “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be My witnesses.”<sup>48</sup>

The Bible uses a special word to describe this work of the Holy Spirit. The word is *inspiration*. Paul used it in this way: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.”<sup>49</sup>

Inspiration. It is not a bad description, because it makes you think of “in-spiriting”, of putting God's Spirit into a man chosen to convey God's words to the world. And yet it is not a particularly good word, because it does not really convey Paul's meaning.

The whole phrase, “given by inspiration of God”, is actually a translation of one long Greek word. That word means “Godspirited” or “Godbreathed”. (Remember that, in Greek, the word for “spirit” also means both “wind” and “breath”.)

So although it is less elegant it is more accurate to translate Paul's words like this: “All scripture is *breathed out* by God.”

In other words, the Bible is expired by God rather than inspired. In a figurative sense it came out of God's mouth, just as our breath comes out of our mouths.

About a thousand years earlier a Jewish hymnwriter had made a similar point. He wrote in the book of Psalms:

“*By the word* of the Lord

Were the heavens made  
And all the host of them  
By the *breath* of His mouth.”<sup>50</sup>

He was referring to the first chapter of Genesis, where God created the heavens and the earth. The words, “And God said, ‘Let there be ...’” keep recurring in that chapter like a refrain. The words of God were spoken; the deeds of God were done.

### Every Word Counts

All this adds up to a vital conclusion. If the Bible’s repeated claim is justified-if there really is a sense in which the Bible is “breathed out of God’s mouth”-it must mean that *the very words of the Bible come from God*, not just the ideas.

At first this sounds a staggering claim. And yet the more you think about it, the more it makes sense. In an unimportant piece of writing-say, a magazine article, or a novel-it doesn’t matter much what words are used, so long as the general sense is what the author intended.

But in an important document, like an Act of Parliament, or a man’s will, the words are terribly important. A wealthy old man once wrote a very short and simple will: “I leave all my money to my nephew Percy.”

Poor Percy. He only got a few pounds. It was quite clear what Uncle *meant*. But Uncle had not *said* what he meant. “Money,” said the lawyers, means pound notes and coins of the realm. Uncle’s fortune was in the form of bank deposits, stocks and shares-and that’s not “money”. The real wealth went to Uncle’s next of kin, while all Percy received was the contents of Uncle’s trouser pockets.

We might expect that if the Bible really is what it claims to be-the most important document in the world-the words it uses are tremendously important. And this is exactly what it claims. No Bible writer ever says, “God gave me a message in vague terms, and left me to write it down in my own words.”

On the contrary, many of them emphasise the precise nature of the message God gave them. For example:

*David:* “MI this the Lord made me understand *in writing* by His hand upon me.”<sup>51</sup>

*Jeremiah:* “Thus saith the Lord . . . speak unto all the cities of ..... all the words that I command thee to speak unto them; *keep not back a word* . . . Take thee a roll of a book and *write therein all the words* that I have spoken unto thee.”<sup>52</sup>

*Jesus:* “The *words* that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life.”<sup>53</sup>

*Paul:* “And we impart this *in words... taught by the Spirit*.”<sup>54</sup>

*John:* “If any man shall take away from *the words* of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life.”<sup>55</sup>

Needless to say, these statements do not apply to the words of the Bible in English. The dear old lady who said, “If the Authorised Version was good enough for St Paul, it’s good enough for me!” has been dead a long time. The men who wrote the original books of the Bible were said to be inspired by God, not the men who afterwards copied those books and translated them into other languages. (Just how accurate were those copyists and translators? We shall look at that

question in Chapter 17.)

### **Writers -Not Typewriters**

There is something almost uncanny about the sight of a big electronic computer working. The heart of the computer is so delicate that it has to be boxed away in an air-conditioned chamber, like a premature baby in an incubator. Wires connect the delicate central part to other machines, through which the operators feed in the problems for solution. Other wires connect the computer to an electric typewriter, which types out the answers.

It is a strange sight to see one of these typewriters typing away at breakneck speed, as if some invisible typist were using it. Those sheets of typed paper are being dictated by the electronic machine in its glass case, and once the machine is set to work on a problem no human being has any control over that typewriter.

Now this is not-repeat, NOT-the way to think of God inspiring the Bible. The writers of the Bible were not just human typewriters, setting down automatically the words that God dictated to them. They were individuals with a style of their own, each writing his inspired message in his own particular way.

At first, this statement may seem to contradict all that has gone before. If God did not dictate His words to the writers of the Bible, but gave them freedom to write in their own style, how could their writings possibly turn out to be the exact words of God?

This problem is not nearly so difficult as it seems. Try looking at it this way. A crack shot with a rifle can still hit the target when a strong wind is blowing. His skill enables him to estimate the force and direction of the wind, and then allow for it when he points his gun. If the wind is blowing strongly from the left, he aims to the left of the target. He knows that his bullet will follow a curved path, and end up on target. But if there is no wind he aims directly at the target, and expects his bullet to travel by a shorter path to it.

In other words, the wind has no effect on the final result. A brilliant marksman's bullet will always end up where he wants it. What the wind does is to decide the path by which the bullet will get there.

It is rather like that, only much more complicated, with the workings of God. He knows exactly what end result He wants to achieve, and with infinite skill He is able to achieve it. He can allow for the effects of human free will-or of the literary style of individuals-as easily as a marksman can allow for the wind.

When He wanted a book written in the characteristic style of Jeremiah, He raised up exactly the right man to write it. He told Jeremiah that He began shaping him for his work as a prophet even before he was born.<sup>56</sup> When the time came for Jeremiah's great work to begin, he was exactly the right man for it. Even his nervousness and humility helped to fit him for the job.<sup>57</sup>

The resulting book was therefore truly Jeremiah's book. No other man, perhaps, could have written it in quite the same way. But because God had made Jeremiah what he was, and then caused him to write what he did, Jeremiah's book was filled with the very words of God. The same applies to all the other books of the Bible.

## What This Chapter Has Proved

This subject of the Bible's claim to be "Godbreathed" (inspired) is a very big one. It really needs a book to itself. In just one chapter I have only been able to outline it. If you wish to examine it in depth, you will need to read one of the standard works on the subject.

The finest book ever written on this topic is probably that by Gausson.<sup>58</sup> More recent books by Warfield,<sup>59</sup> Young<sup>60</sup> and Pache<sup>61</sup> are also useful.

Like this chapter, none of these books *proves* that the Bible is inspired by God. It is always wrong to reason in a circle; we must beware of making that mistake here.

I have not tried to argue that because the Bible makes certain claims, those claims must be true. What I have tried to show is that the Bible's claims are so emphatic, so clear cut, that they must be either true or false.

The Bible writers all say with one accord:

"What we have written are not our own words. God miraculously took control of us, and caused us to write His words. Consequently, everything we have written has the authority of the Almighty behind it. Everything we have written is true."

It stands to reason that there are only two possibilities. Either the Bible's astonishing claim is true-or the book is the biggest confidence trick in all history!

But as we saw at the beginning of this chapter, many leaders of religion refuse to accept that these are the only alternatives. They adopt a third point of view. They say that the Bible is sort-of-true and sort-of-false.

Of course, they don't put it like that. They express their views in language that is almost impossible for the man in the street to understand. But that is what it comes down to. Unlike the prophets, unlike Jesus Christ, unlike the apostles, these Biblical scholars believe in a Bible that is neither true nor false, but something in between.

There are many of them and their views are widely known. So we cannot ignore them. The next chapter will take a look at their position and see where it leads us.

### ***Falling Between Two Stools***

Charles is a typical middle-aged Englishman. Most people like him, because he's a friendly sort of chap. Good hearted, good living and public spirited, too.

He stood for the local council last year, but failed to get in. He never goes to church, but he would be hurt if you suggested he was not a Christian. He believes in keeping the Ten Commandments (or at least, as many as he can remember), and in being kind to other people.

Of course, he doesn't believe in the Bible, except for a few bits that he approves of. Like most people, he follows the fashion and assumes that the Bible has been shot full of holes by scientists and other experts. And anyway, he says he can live a perfectly good life without the Bible, thank you.

Yet Charles has suddenly become a worried man. His tranquil life has recently taken a very nasty knock. He has two teenage sons who are worrying him stiff. They stoop to every kind of petty dishonesty they can get away with, and the way they behave with girls makes Charles' hair go grey.

The worst of it is that Charles feels so powerless. Whenever he says anything, he comes up against a stone wall. "But why not, Dad? We're not hurting anybody. Why shouldn't we do what we like?"

Poor Charles has no answer for them. If he says, "Because I say so!" they merely retort, "And who do you think you are?"

He knows how his father made him toe the line, forty years ago. The old man simply said, "Charles, pack this up! It's wrong. The Bible says so." In those days Charles knew that to his father the Bible was authoritative. So Charles did as he was told.

But Charles cannot talk to his own sons like that. They know he doesn't accept the authority of the Bible. Charles believes in keeping the Commandments, and it upsets him to see his sons breaking them. But he doesn't know *why* he keeps them. So how can he hope to persuade his sons to keep them?

Charles is not alone in this. There are hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, of fathers in the same uncomfortable position.

The fact is that there always was only one good reason for keeping the Commandments. They are introduced by the statement: "And God spake all these words, saying..."<sup>1</sup>

And they are immediately followed by a passage that says:

"And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking... And the Lord said unto Moses, Thus thou shalt say unto the children of Israel, Ye have seen that I have talked with you from heaven."<sup>2</sup>

That is why a hundred generations of God-fearing Jews have respected the Ten Commandments. They believed that the whole book of Exodus was true. They believed that God really did appear on Mount Sinai and thunder out those commandments to their ancestors.

Jesus Christ endorsed that belief. Several books of the New Testament refer directly to it as a historical fact.<sup>3</sup> That is why many generations of Bible-believing Christians like Charles' father

have had a profound respect for the Commandments.

### **Thin End of the Wedge**

There is a big lesson to be learnt from this.

If you believe that God led Israel to Mount Sinai by a succession of mighty miracles, and there gave them His Law, the Commandments will have supreme authority. They will be a power in your life. They cannot be anything else, if you really believe they came down from heaven.

But suppose you listen to the wrong kind of expert. Suppose you lap up the misguided philosophy that says: "Miracles are impossible. Much of the book of Exodus is fiction. The Commandments were made up by a group of pious men, not thundered out from heaven."

Then what? All the power and authority is gone. "Keep the Commandments if you want to; break them if you don't. If God didn't give the Commandments He won't punish you for breaking them." This is the inevitable reaction.

Where moral standards are concerned there is no permanent halfway house. The whole Bible stands or falls together, and moral standards stand or fall with it. If it is what it claims to be, inspired by God and authoritative from beginning to end, then it demands our obedience. But if not, there is no real reason why we should not do what we like.

More and more people are realising this now. That is why more and more people are casting off all restraint. We ought not to be surprised by the rocketing statistics of crime, immorality, drug-addiction and violence. Far-sighted men and women saw it coming, more than a hundred years ago. They knew the thin end of a wedge when they saw it.

Until about the middle of the last century practically all Christian scholars accepted the Bible's own claim to be the words of God. There were some scholars who attacked the Bible, but generally they made no claim to be Christian. For some time their attacks on the Bible had little effect. But soon after the middle of the nineteenth century they made a breakthrough.

Around that time there was a great leap forward in human knowledge. The foundations of modern science were being laid. The two great offshoots of science, medicine and engineering, were working wonders undreamed of a few years before. Historians and archaeologists were busy unravelling the secrets of the past.

The result of all this was a great epidemic of swollen heads in the universities of the world. Few scholars had the humility to think, "Now we are a little less ignorant than we were before." The general reaction was, "Look how wise we are now! Within a few years we shall know practically everything worth knowing."

Swinburne captured the spirit of the age in verse:

"Glory to Man in the highest!  
For Man is the master of things."

In this climate of opinion scholars jumped recklessly to conclusions, without waiting for proper evidence. And a large part of the general public jumped blindly after them.

Darwin's *Origin of Species* was sold out on the day of publication. Before they had even read it, some people started to believe that Darwin had disproved the existence of a Creator.

Archaeologists decided that writing was not invented until after Moses was dead, and that consequently Moses could not possibly have written any part of the Bible. Historians decided that nearly all the books of the Bible were full of historical blunders, and therefore could not have been written by eye-witnesses.

We know now that all these gentlemen were, in fact, talking through the back of their learned necks. Modern scholars regard nineteenth-century scholarship as a hotchpotch of truth and error. But this realisation came too late to avert a tragedy. Very many Christian ministers of that time were taken in by the great flood of over-confident nineteenth-century scholarship. They accepted the view that the Bible was a collection of pious forgeries, written at a late date and palmed off on an ancient public as the works of famous men.

By the turn of the century this view was held by the majority of Christian scholars. By then it was being taught in many theological colleges as if it were the unquestionable truth. And, of course, the young students at those colleges lapped it up without question. (They had to, if they wanted to pass their exams.) The fact that a very different viewpoint was still being taught at other colleges was quietly overlooked.

### **From Bad to Worse**

It took a little time before it dawned on the average man what these views meant. If the Book of Isaiah did not even contain the words of Isaiah, you could hardly expect it to contain the words of God. If the four gospels were not written until long after Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were dead, you could not rely on what they said about Jesus. Some of it might be true, some untrue. Each man was free to choose how much he would believe.

It was obvious where this would lead. Gradually men would choose to believe less and less of the Bible, until finally they believed nothing at all.

What was a little more unexpected was the way religious leaders gradually became more and more extreme in their statements. At first they expressed their views moderately. In the nineteen thirties Archbishop Temple wrote:

“There is no single deed or saying of His [Christ’s] of which we can be perfectly sure that He said or did precisely this or that.”<sup>4</sup>

Though this makes sad reading, at least the language is restrained. It contrasts strikingly with a more recent statement by another religious leader. In 1966~ Dr. Leslie Weatherhead, one-time President of the Methodist Conference, was reported as saying that he would like to go through the Bible with a blue pencil and blot out various portions. He called the Old Testament out of date and completely outmoded. He described many of the Psalms as nonsense.<sup>5</sup>

The end of the road was reached in 1966, when the following letter appeared in a leading British newspaper.<sup>6</sup>

“Sir,

I do not believe in the existence of God; I believe that love, or ‘agape’, as exemplified in the life of Jesus, is the key to human relationships.

John Smith

(Methodist Minister)  
Wallsend.”

What a sad confession. The “Reverend” John Smith (the name has been altered) admits he does not believe in God.

At least you have to admire his courage. In the same newspaper a week before, a well known unbeliever, John Gilmour, had thrown Out a challenge. He declared that many leaders of the Church no longer believed in God. All they had, he said, was a general belief in Christian love as the key to human relationships. He dared them to come clean, and admit it. This Methodist minister accepted the challenge and owned up.

And why not? He has only gone one short step further than many of his colleagues. The existence of God was just about the only Bible teaching left that had not been denied by some minister of religion.

### **The Unhappy Medium**

Of course, not all those Biblical scholars who reject the Bible’s claims go to such wild extremes. There are still many who take a more moderate position. Between them they hold many different shades of opinion. Some think the Bible contains a lot of truth and only a little error; some think it is the other way round. It would be impossible in a single chapter to do justice to all their views.

But their most common approach to the Bible can be expressed quite simply. They say that the Bible is “reliable in matters of religion, but unreliable in historical matters”.

What does that mean? Simply this. That when John wrote that Jesus said, “A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another”<sup>7</sup>-and suchlike thing-we can accept them as true. But that when we read how the baby Moses’ life was saved because his mother hid him in the bulrushes,<sup>8</sup> we are at liberty to say, “A likely story!”

If we hold these views, we shall believe that this story about Moses -and hundreds of other Bible stories-are fiction, not fact. We shall say, “What does it matter, anyway, whether these things happened or not? We can learn useful lessons from these stories, just as we can from the parables of Jesus. Nobody regards His parables as true stories.”

Several things are very wrong with this approach. First of all, Jesus presented his parables as parables. Many of them are introduced by the words, “He spake a parable unto them.” Every one of them is worded in what you might call “a parable style”.

If the parable of the Good Samaritan had begun, “Last week Simon Peter’s cousin was going down from Jerusalem . . .” we should have known that Jesus was telling a true story. But it didn’t. It began, “A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho . . .”<sup>9</sup> Everyone knew at once that this was a parable.

Now when Jesus and the apostles referred to Old Testament history, they never spoke about it in “parable style”. They always treated it as accurate history. True, they did draw lessons from it, but they made it plain that these were *lessons drawn from real life*. When Paul based some lessons on a series of episodes from the history of Israel, he said:

“These things happened unto them by way of example, and they were written for our admonition.”<sup>10</sup>

These things happened. Actually *happened*. Could words be plainer than that?  
As for Jesus, He spoke of many incidents in the Old Testament, including:

The story of Adam and Eve<sup>11</sup>  
The murder of Abel by Cain<sup>12</sup>  
Noah and the flood<sup>13</sup>  
The destruction of Sodom and the death of Lot's wife<sup>14</sup>  
Moses and the burning bush<sup>15</sup>  
The manna that fell from heaven<sup>16</sup>  
Solomon and the Queen of Sheba<sup>17</sup>  
Elijah and a miracle<sup>18</sup>  
Elisha and another miracle<sup>19</sup>  
Jonah and the whale<sup>20</sup>

Turn up these passages in your own Bible. See for yourself how Jesus obviously believed that all these events really did occur.

There is another big snag about saying the Bible is “religiously true but historically unreliable”. The historical and religious strands of the Bible are intertwined like the threads in a Persian carpet. How are we going to separate them? In fact, no two scholars seem to agree on which bits are “historical” and which are “religious”.

Take the story that Jesus rose from the dead. We meet it in all four gospels, in the books of Acts and Revelation, and in several of the epistles. It is presented to us in these books as a historical fact. For this reason many scholars feel free to reject it as a myth.

But it is more than a historical fact. It is also presented to us as a foundation stone of the Christian religion. Listen to the apostle Paul:

“How say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen, and if Christ be not risen then is our preaching vain and your faith is also vain.... *If Christ be not raised your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins!*”<sup>21</sup>

Then there is the problem that if Christ really was wrong in His teaching about the Old Testament, how can we be sure of anything else He taught? He backed up His claim to be the Son of God with a quotation from the Psalms, saying as He did so, “And the Scripture cannot be broken!”<sup>22</sup> If He was wrong about Scripture, how do we know that He was not wrong about being Son of God?

He said that resurrection and eternal life could be relied upon because of what the book of Exodus said.<sup>23</sup> If He was wrong about the book of Exodus, how do we know that He was not wrong about eternal life?

Lots of Bible-believing theologians have asked this kind of question.<sup>24</sup> But so far as I know, nobody has ever given them a reasonable answer.

It is not surprising there has been a steady drift away from this “half and half” position. The drift has mainly been in the direction of complete unbelief, but quite a number of scholars have moved in the opposite direction towards complete belief. There may be some difficulties

connected with wholehearted belief. But there are far greater problems facing those who try to believe only parts of the Bible. There is an increasing awareness of this fact among thinking Christians today.

### **Cleverness and Commonsense**

Everybody has heard of absent-minded professors. But in fact there can't be very many of them about. Quite a few of my friends are professors, and none of them is what I would call absent-minded. They are all men of very keen intellect.

Yet there is a certain element of truth underlying the legend of the absent-minded professor. Brilliant men are often lacking in plain common sense. Many an uneducated wife has said to a husband with twenty letters after his name, "But even I wouldn't do a silly thing like that, darling!"

So it behoves us to remember that in everyday matters, very learned men often do silly things. And the Bible tells us that in religious matters also they often do silly things. The apostle Paul was a man of tremendous intellect; this is very obvious to anyone who studies his writings. But he had the humility to admit that cleverness can easily become more of a liability than an asset to a would-be Christian.

The highest social class in Israel consisted of the highly educated religious leaders. Paul belonged to that class. But he was no snob. He became ashamed of his own class, and left it to become a Christian, when he realised that this intellectual elite had crucified the Son of God.

So he warned his own age-and our age, too-not to be overawed by the learning of the learned:

"Where is your wise man now, your man of learning, or your subtle debater-limited, all of them, to this passing age? God has made the wisdom of this world look foolish. As God in His wisdom ordained, the world failed to find Him by its wisdom . . . Divine folly is wiser than the wisdom of man, and divine weakness stronger than man's strength. My brothers, think what sort of people you are, whom God has called. Few of you are men of wisdom, by any human standard; few are powerful or highly born. Yet, to shame the wise, God has chosen what the world counts folly, and to shame what is strong, God has chosen what the world counts weakness.

. . . And so there is no place for human pride in the presence of God."<sup>25</sup>

Jesus said much the same, but more briefly:

"At that moment Jesus exulted in the Holy Spirit, and said, 'I thank Thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for hiding these things from the learned and wise, and revealing them to the simple. Yes, Father, such was Thy choice.'<sup>26</sup>

In view of these warnings it should carry very little weight that the majority of Christian scholars view the Bible as a mixture of truth and error. They do not form an overwhelming majority, although they sometimes try to give that impression. Nevertheless they are a large majority. But what of that? A large majority of the leading Biblical scholars in Israel voted to reject Christ.

If we had lived in the first century and had chosen to follow the great bulk of scholars, we should have joined the mob and shouted, "Crucify Him!" Christians who choose to take the majority path today are in danger of making a similar tragic mistake. "Tear up the Bible!" is the modern counterpart of "Crucify Him!"

### Why They Do It

It would be interesting to know why so many Biblical scholars take the line they do. There must be many reasons. The desire to conform, the fear of seeming ridiculous, too much uncritical respect for what "the experts" say, an exaggerated view of the difficulties of accepting the Bible wholeheartedly, a failure to appreciate the limitations of subjects outside their own sphere (such as history and science)-all these must play their part.

But there is a more important reason than any of these. So much depends upon the attitude a scholar has towards the object of his studies.

Dr. Jane Goodall, while still in her twenties, came to know more about chimpanzees than anyone else in the world. Her brilliant research work is one of the great scientific success stories of the 1960s. She succeeded where others had failed because she adopted an entirely new attitude.

Previous research workers had brought chimpanzees into their laboratories and studied them from every conceivable point of view. They taught them tricks and observed how they solved puzzles. They studied the effect of drugs and surgical operations upon them. They killed them, cut them up into little bits, and looked at the pieces under the microscope. And still they had a poor understanding of chimpanzee behaviour, and quite a few wrong notions about them.

Then Dr. Goodall tried a different approach. She went into the heart of the African bush and camped out for several years among a colony of chimpanzees. After a while they accepted her almost like one of themselves. For the first time a scientist was able to observe chimpanzees behaving absolutely naturally. She was able to see things from a chimp's point of view.

She came home at last and published her findings. The title of her report is revealing: *My Friends the Chimps*.<sup>27</sup> Instead of standing detached from the objects of her studies, looking down upon them with a superior air, she came down to their level. She met them on their own terms. Hence her remarkable success.

Similarly, there were two very different ways of approaching Jesus of Nazareth. On one occasion, what we should call a commission of enquiry came to watch Him at work. Its members were eminent scholars, drawn from all over the country.<sup>28</sup> They studied Him critically for a while, no doubt conscious of their own scholarship and full of confidence in their ability to judge Him. Then they announced their decision. "Who is this which speaketh blasphemies?"<sup>29</sup>

The other way was the way of Mary of Bethany. She "sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word."<sup>80</sup> Where the committee of scholars had looked down on Him, she looked up at Him. From their different viewpoints they beheld the same man. But the scholars saw a "blasphemer"; the humble woman saw the Son of God.

There are the same two alternative ways of approaching the Bible. Some scholars-all too many of them-look down at the Bible with a cool, detached air. A "scientific" attitude they like to

call it, just as the biologists who studied chimpanzees in cages thought their methods were the height of good science. They dissect the Bible into little bits, and examine each bit under the microscope of their specialist knowledge.

But there are other men, just as scholarly, as well as a whole host of ordinary folk, who look up at the Bible instead of down at it. They follow the Jane Goodall technique, by studying the Bible on its own terms. Because she was a friend to the chimps, she quickly became the world's foremost chimpanzee scholar.

Similarly, the wisest Bible scholars-those whose conclusions are most likely to be right-are those who can speak of "my friend, the Bible." They follow the example of Mary, who sat at the feet of Jesus to hear Him. They sit down before the Bible to learn *from* it, not just to learn *about* it.

Think how different things might be if all scholars had possessed the spirit of Dr. Goodall and of Mary of Bethany. It would have made them no less scholarly, no less scientific. But it would have made them far more humble and far more balanced. It would have preserved their common sense. And thus this strange, incredible idea of a "true-false" Word of God would never have come to undermine the foundations of the Christian faith.

### ***When were the Books Written?***

Just when were the sixty-six books of the Bible written?

This is an absolutely crucial question. If the Bible is what it claims to be, its sixty-six books must have been written by the men named as their authors. The authors of a few books are not stated, but the Bible tells us who wrote all the others. And they cannot have been written by those men unless they were written in their lifetimes.

Well, were they or weren't they written at the right time?

The short answer is that scholars differ in their opinions. About the books of the Old Testament they differ very much indeed. About the books of the New Testament there is very much less difference of opinion.

Let me warn you of a common fallacy. Some people seem to think that with all this difference of opinion about the Old Testament, the situation is well nigh hopeless. How can the ordinary Bible-believer ever hope to establish the genuineness of the Old Testament books, if even the scholars do not really know the facts?

Don't worry. There is no need to look at it like that. Every time you receive a letter in an unknown handwriting, do you say, "Perhaps this letter is a forgery"? Of course not. You assume that a letter is genuine unless there is some reason to think otherwise-just as, in English law, a man is deemed innocent until he is proved guilty.

It is not up to you to prove that each letter you receive is genuine, not even if a friend asks you to do so. If he says that a certain letter is a forgery, it is up to him to prove it a forgery. Unless he provides convincing proof of this, you are entitled to go on assuming the letter's genuineness.

The Bible-believer is in a similar position. He has many good reasons for thinking that the Old Testament is part of the Word of God. (Some of these reasons were given in Part One of this book.) With evidence like that before him, there is no need for him to prove that each book was written at the right time, by the right author. He is fully entitled to assume that they were.

Keep that fact always in mind as you go through this chapter. The Bible-believer is the man in the position of strength. There is no need to ask, "Can we prove that the Old Testament books were written by the men whose names they bear?"

The only legitimate question is this: "Can those who criticise the Bible prove that its books were *not* written by the men named as their authors?"

That is the question at issue. Now let us look for an answer.

### **The Attack on the Old Testament**

The great scholarly attack on the Old Testament was mounted just over a hundred years ago. But it did not spring into existence overnight. Many of the arguments used were first put forward in the eighteenth century, or even earlier. It was only in the middle of the nineteenth century that those arguments began to lead to a great popular movement.

This movement was associated with a literary technique known as "higher criticism". This

was a perfectly legitimate form of study which had been in use for a long time. It was devoted to studying the sources used by the authors of ancient books-not just Biblical books but any ancient books.

Unfortunately, in the days of the great attack on the Bible, higher criticism was used in a most unbalanced way. Many higher critics chose to ignore what Jesus taught about the Bible, and to let their imaginations run riot. Fierce controversies took place, with both sides sometimes expressing themselves in a less-than-Christian fashion.

These wordy battles had an unhappy sequel. The world's Biblical scholars became divided into two camps, and the split has continued right down to the present day. Those who continued to regard the Bible as true were the smaller group. They reacted violently against the way their opponents used the methods of higher criticism to undermine people's faith in the Bible, and they began to use the term "higher critic" as if it meant "someone who pulls the Bible to pieces."

At the time this was not far from the truth. Even today most higher critics reject the idea that the whole Bible is true, and most Bible-believers refuse to have anything to do with higher criticism. There are a few scholars who use the methods of higher criticism in a sensible way and remain staunch Bible-believers. But for simplicity's sake I shall disregard their existence, and use the terms "higher critic" and "critical scholar" to mean the general run of higher critics, who argue that the Bible is, at best, only partly true.

Most of the heat has gone out of the controversy nowadays. Many of today's critical scholars are much more moderate than those of the last century. But the underlying problems are still there, and so we must have a look at the critics' point of view. We shall understand this better if we begin by considering how their ideas first developed.

A very brief summary of the nineteenth-century critical scholars' case runs like this:

(1) *Moses could not write*. Archaeologists had found evidence that writing went back to nearly 1000 B.C., but beyond that there was nothing. The idea of Moses writing a code of laws hundreds of years earlier was clearly absurd. Therefore there must be another explanation: some other person, or persons, must have written the Jewish law long after Moses was dead.

(2) *Evidences of multiple authorship*. Many of the books of the Old Testament do not read like the writings of one man. There is a fair amount of repetition, and sudden changes from one style of writing to another. Therefore it can be inferred that lots of unknown authors wrote little bits of the Old Testament books, and unknown editors welded these bits together into complete books. Eventually the Jewish public were persuaded that long-dead men, like Moses, and David, and Solomon and Isaiah, had written these recently compiled books.

(3) *Historical errors*. The Old Testament, it was thought, was riddled with historical errors. Eye-witnesses would never have made these blunders. Therefore the Bible was not a book of history written at the time things happened, but a collection of legends handed down by word of mouth for generations, and put in writing long afterwards. The people and places mentioned often did not exist, and when they did were often spelt wrongly or set in the wrong period of history. Even the words used were words from the wrong period-as if someone had tried to write a fake Shakespeare play, but had foolishly included some modern American slang.

## **The Turn of the Tide**

It would be an exaggeration to say that the new wave of critical theories about the Old Testament

swept all before it. There were a great many Bible-believing scholars who remained unconvinced by the new theories. Nevertheless the critical movement did have a tremendous success.

In one way this success was short-lived, in another, long-lived. In its original form it was short-lived because it had no sooner reached its peak, around the turn of the century, than some of its foundations were shown to be false.

Archaeologists who had been looking for evidence of the dawn of civilisation made an uncomfortable discovery: for many years they had been digging in the wrong place! They had concentrated their efforts in the land we now call Iraq, in the territory of ancient Assyria in the valleys of the Tigris and Euphrates. This earlier work had convinced them that writing was invented less than three thousand years ago.

Then they moved down the rivers to the coastal plain. They dug up a number of cities in the area once called Babylonia, and made some startling discoveries. At Nippur, Ashur, Ur and Kish they found thousands of clay tablets covered with writing, far older than any written material previously known. Many of them were dated at about the time of Moses; some of them went back to far earlier periods, perhaps even as much as a thousand years before Moses was born.

Some of these ancient records consisted of codes of law drawn up by various kings. The earliest law code known today is probably that of the Sumerian king, Ur Nammu. He lived about four thousand years ago. A more famous law code was compiled by Hammurabi, sixth king of the first dynasty of Babylon, in about 1700 B.C.

Since Moses lived around 1300 B.C. it was clear that the early higher critics had made a fundamental blunder. Writing in general, and writing books of laws in particular, was already a very ancient art when Moses was born. So Moses certainly could have written the law that bears his name.

Not only so, but large numbers of people would have been able to read what he wrote. The earliest form of writing was "picture writing", in which a different little diagram is used for every word. The great breakthrough in human communications - even more important than the invention of printing - was the invention of the alphabet. And this occurred long before the time of Moses.

Consequently writing was already in common use by quite ordinary people. Not only legal documents by kings have been found in these ancient cities, but personal letters, records of business deals, lists of stores held by merchants, and so forth.

There is a very interesting passage in the Revised Standard Version (a Bible translation published in 1952) of the book of Judges. It describes an event occurring about a hundred years after the time of Moses:

"Then Gideon the son of Joash returned from the battle by the ascent of Heres. And he caught a young man of Succoth and questioned him; and *he wrote down* for him the officials and elders of Succoth, seventy-seven men."<sup>1</sup>

When the Revised Version (another Bible translation) was published in 1884 the translators could not bring themselves to say that the young man "wrote". Their translation says he "described" the men in question (although they pointed out in a footnote that the Hebrew word

does really mean “wrote”). Evidently the scholars of the late nineteenth century could not conceive of an ordinary prisoner of war in Gideon’s day being able to write. But in the light of modern knowledge it seems altogether possible.

### **Who Compiled What?**

There is no doubt that a great deal of compiling has occurred in the writing of the Bible. Authors always have made a habit of quoting earlier authors. The Bible makes no secret of this. Moses admitted that he used material from the book of The Wars of Jehovah,<sup>2</sup> and two other authors said they borrowed from the book of Jasher.<sup>3</sup> Other writers refer to at least eight more lost books that they used as sources of information.<sup>4</sup> The question upon which scholars disagree is this: who did the compiling?

When the nineteenth-century critics reached their premature conclusion that Moses could not write, they were led on a false trail. Naturally, they said, the Law of Moses must have been compiled in the days when men could write. So they produced a theory that it was produced roughly halfway between the times of Moses and Christ.

They had no hope of establishing the actual identities of their supposed authors and compilers. So they gave them fictitious labels. One imaginary gentleman was known as J, because he always called God “Jehovah”. Another was called E, because he preferred the Hebrew word *Elohim* for God. Then there was D; he was largely responsible for the book of Deuteronomy. P was a priest; you could tell the bits he wrote (or so they said) by his priestly leanings.

There were quite a lot of other members of the critics’ Editorial Committee. Some of them were formed by splitting up men like D into D The First, D The Second, and so on. Another view is that some of the JEDP family should be regarded as different traditions rather than as individual men. But we need not concern ourselves with the finer points of the theory. J, E, D, and P always have been the Big Four; it will simplify matters if we concentrate on them.

After years of arguing about who wrote which bits, the critics finally reached something like unanimity. They published an edition of the Bible which, if not intended to be the last word in Biblical scholarship, was at least supposed to be somewhere near it. So that the reader could see who was supposed to have written what, J’s contributions were printed in one colour, E’s in another, D’s in a third, and so on. Since the colours sometimes switched about from verse to verse, or even from line to line, the result looked more like a Scotsman’s kilt than a holy book.

The fact that they could issue such a book as this shows how very self-confident the early higher critics were. It never seemed to occur to them that their work was highly speculative, based on very slender evidence. Like fond parents they could see nothing wrong with their own offspring. “Critical scholars” they called themselves; but where their own work was concerned they were some of the most uncritical people on earth.

If it were not for this, they might have had a fresh look at their subject when their mammoth boob about Moses being “unable to write” was exposed. Unfortunately this did nothing to shake their self-confidence. By this time they were so sold on J, E, D, and P that they pressed on regardless, refining their ideas of which of these mythical gentlemen wrote what.

Meanwhile a considerable number of other men were looking at the Old Testament from another point of view. As Bible-believers they failed to see how the JEDP school could possibly be right, because that would mean that Jesus Christ had been wrong. Because of this their opponents called them biased. Perhaps they were biased, but no more so than the higher critics themselves. And they were certainly not ignoramuses. Many of them were scholars of international renown.

These Bible-believing scholars of seventy years ago published many books and papers opposing the critical theories of the day. Some of these are classics, still worthy of study today.<sup>5</sup> They made four main points:

(1) That archaeologists were constantly making discoveries that revealed the unsoundness of many of the critics' assumptions.

(2) That other theories to explain the evidence of compilation in the Old Testament could be produced; these fitted the facts just as well as the JEDP theories, and had the overwhelming advantage of not conflicting with the views of Christ and His apostles.

(3) That the critics' arguments based upon style and vocabulary were far from watertight, especially in the light of our rapidly increasing knowledge of ancient languages.

(4) That Old Testament history was far more reliable than the critics had thought. Every year new discoveries were coming to light that necessitated some rewriting of our history books. And frequently, where the older versions of the history books pronounced the Bible 'wrong, the newer versions agreed that the Bible had been right after all.

This last point, the accuracy of Bible history, is covered in Chapter 18. I shall deal briefly with the other three points here.

### Why Not Moses?

If JEDP ~ Co. did not compile the first five books of the Bible, who did?

The obvious answer is, Moses. There is no proof that it wasn't Moses. Since writing was known long before his time, there would have been plenty of existing writing for him to work with.

God made some tremendously important promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the ancestors of Moses.<sup>7</sup> According to both the Christian New Testament<sup>7</sup> and the Jewish Talmud<sup>8</sup> these promises implied a hope of resurrection and personal immortality for Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Since writing was in use in Abraham's day, it seems highly likely that he and his family would have kept a record of these promises. Perhaps they kept accounts of God's other dealings with them, too.

One archaeologist has suggested that there may even have been some written records dating back to the time of Adam.<sup>9</sup> (The question of whether Adam was a real man, and if so, when he lived, is discussed in Chapter 23.) This startling suggestion may sound highly improbable, but P. J. Wiseman supplies a surprising amount of evidence for it. Don't dismiss the idea out of hand without first reading his book.

Although they may not have gone back as far as Wiseman suggests, there were undoubtedly many written documents available to Moses. If, as seems almost certain, he made use of these, this could account for all the evidences of compilation in his five books.

For example, some people make a great song and dance about what they call "the two

contradictory records of creation” in Genesis 1 and 2. This is a most misleading expression. There are two records, but they are not contradictory. They describe some of the same events, but from two very different points of view.

As Wiseman pointed out, the phrase “these are the generations of so-and-so” occurs eleven times in Genesis, and always at or near the end of the story of so-and-so. It does not mean, “these are the children of”. It means, “that was the story of”. It appears to be Moses’ way of acknowledging that the material he had just included in Genesis was taken from a written record about so-and-so. The writing, by the way, would not have been on paper, but on a baked clay tablet.

The first occurrence of “these are the generations of . . .” is unique. Here in Genesis 2, verse 4, “so-and-so” is not a person but “the heavens and the earth”. It concludes the first creation story, which gives a birds-eye view of the whole of creation. Perhaps, if I may use the expression reverently, a “God’s-eye” view would describe it better.

The second creation story runs from Genesis 2, verse 5, to the end of the chapter. It forms the first section of “the generations of Adam”, which end, with that phrase, in chapter 5, verse 1. So this second narrative is concerned with creation from Adam’s point of view. It is not concerned with the creation of the world, but only with the creation of Adam and his homeland, the Garden of Eden.

The “earth”, whose creation is referred to in verse 5, is almost certainly the land of Eden. It is a translation of the Hebrew word *eretz*, which can mean “earth” but is more frequently translated “land”-as in *Eretz Israel*, the Land of Israel. This is why there is no mention of “the heavens” in the second creation narrative.

We do not know why God chose to give these two separate, complementary stories of creation. We don’t know when He revealed them, or to whom. The internal evidence indicates that He did give them, that they were written down, and that Moses brought them together. In the present state of our knowledge we can go no further than that.

And what about the evidence of compilation in the later books of Moses? Here again we cannot go very far, but it is possible to make some reasonable guesses.

Writing in those days was a very laborious business. Moses was a very busy man, and he would have needed some help. In those days great men dictated to professional writers - called “amanuenses” - just as business men dictate to their secretaries today. We can almost take it for granted that Moses used secretaries, just as Paul did.

We do not know how much freedom Moses gave his secretaries. Paul evidently allowed his a certain amount of liberty, because in one of his epistles this verse appears:

“I, Tertius, who wrote this epistle, salute you in the Lord.”<sup>10</sup>

A German scholar<sup>11</sup> has shown that ancient Greek authors generally gave their secretaries a fair amount of freedom. The author would dictate while the secretary wrote on a wax tablet; this allowed him to write very rapidly. Later, the secretary would copy his text on to papyrus (the ancient equivalent of paper), perhaps tidying up the grammar as he went. Then the original author would read his secretary’s handiwork, and correct it himself where he thought necessary. Finally he would add a farewell greeting in his own hand.<sup>12</sup>

Very tentatively, let us suppose that Moses used several secretaries. Suppose that he allowed each one a certain freedom of style. Suppose that Moses gathered all their writings together, incorporated as much of the already-existing writings as he wanted to use, and then gave the whole job a final editorial polish.

If this is what happened, it would account for all the little peculiarities that the higher critics have pointed out. Moreover, if God was supervising the whole operation and guiding all concerned by His Spirit, the result would be the inspired, infallible book that Jesus and the apostles believed it to be.

Guesswork, conjecture, did you say? Yes, of course it's all conjecture. How could any theory of the composition of an ancient book be anything else? The JEDP theories are only conjecture. And it is very doubtful whether the critics' conjectures fit the facts any better than this conjecture.

In much the same way, any compiling that has occurred in the later books of the Old Testament could be the work of the men named in the Bible as their authors.

### **Direct Evidence for Early Dates**

As a research worker myself, I know what a temptation it is to turn a blind eye to uncomfortable facts. A scientist has said that the frequent tragedy of science is a beautiful theory killed by an ugly fact. Naturally, when it is my own beautiful theory that is in peril, I should not be human if I didn't shy away from the menacing facts.

To an outside observer it rather looks as if many critical scholars are reacting like that. Having committed themselves to late dates for the Old Testament books, they now find it very hard to give due weight to the evidence for an early date.

Many of the place names in the early chapters of Genesis, for example, have never been explained by the critical scholars.<sup>13</sup> One verse says:

*“And the border of the Canaanite was from Zidon as thou goest towards Gerar unto Gaza as thou goest towards Sodom and Gomorrah.”<sup>14</sup>*

Sodom and Gomorrah? According to the Bible they were wiped out in the days of Abraham. No factual record of their continued existence occurs anywhere, in the Bible or out of it. How come, then, that we have this geographical instruction based on the location of Sodom and Gomorrah? This is almost overwhelming evidence that these words were written in or before the time of Abraham, and incorporated in Genesis by Moses.

And this evidence is not alone. Genesis 14 is about Abraham. It contains a number of ancient place names used nowhere else in the Bible. None of the readers would have known where those places were. In the same way as a modern writer might say, “Petrograd (now called Leningrad)”, Genesis 14 says:

“Bela (which is Zoar)”-verses \* and 8.

“Vale of Siddim (which is the Salt Sea)”-verse 3.

“En-mishpat (which is Kadesh)”-verse 7.

“Hobah (which is on the left hand of Damascus)”-verse 15.

“Vale of Shaveh (which is the King's Dale)”-verse 17.

Which is more likely: that Abraham, or someone of his day, wrote the original account using the place names as they were then, and that Moses, compiling Genesis, added his “modern” equivalents? Or that, as the critical theories imply, some scribe a thousand years after Abraham invented all those unknown names for no apparent reason?

The critical scholars reply to these arguments by pointing out that the opposite condition sometimes applies. That is, that some places are called in the Bible by names that were not used at the time the book concerned was said to be written. This is a poor argument. It does not weaken the force of the argument given above, and carries little weight on its own. How do we *know* that the names used in the Bible were not in use at an early date? Tomorrow some archaeologist may dig up evidence that they were! In any case, there is already archaeological evidence that some cities in Old Testament times had two, three and even four different names, all in use at one time.<sup>15</sup>

Higher critics have always based a lot of arguments on the nature of words. For example, some words entered the English language suddenly, at a known date. “Blitz” and “quisling”, for instance, were never used in English until 1940.

This is fine, but there are not very many words, even in modern English, that can be dated so accurately. Trying to do this sort of thing with a language three thousand years old is a very chancy business.

Dr. R. D. Wilson was a Bible-believer. He was also a Professor of Semitic Philology. Philology means “the science of language”; Semitic means Hebrew and related languages. In short, he was a leading expert in this field. He spent a vast amount of time—probably as much as almost any critical scholar—analysing the vocabulary of the Old Testament. His findings<sup>18</sup> “proved” the early dates for the Old Testament, just as clearly as critics had used the same methods to “prove” late dates for them.

What this really means, of course, is that neither party had really proved anything - except, perhaps, the power of prejudice over the human mind! The real value of Dr. Wilson’s work was to show the uselessness of basing any conclusions on this sort of argument.

## Style

Up to a point you can tell a writer from his style. But only up to a point. I write scientific papers, and I write Christian tracts. It would surprise me very much if any reader ever connected one of my unsigned tracts with my scientific papers. Because I am writing in a different field, for a different readership, I deliberately employ a different style.

Authors change their styles unconsciously, as well as consciously. Sometimes their style changes as they grow older. The poems written by Wordsworth at the end of his life are in quite a different style from his earlier poems. Some of Milton’s works are in a very different style from his other writings, perhaps because of changes in his health.<sup>17</sup>

Because of this, it is surprising to find anyone drawing definite conclusions from variations in literary style. Yet this is just what higher critics tend to do. They say the Book of Deuteronomy “could not” have been written by the same author as the Book of Leviticus, because the style is

different. Some of Paul's epistles "could not" have been written by the same man as the others, because the style is different.

Recently the whole question of style has gained a new significance, because computers are now used to analyse literary style. In fact it is all a lot of fuss about nothing, because the computers are not doing anything new. They are merely being used to do a lot of tedious arithmetic. They count the average length of sentence in a book, the average length of word, the frequency with which certain words and phrases occur, and so on. Thus they enable a statistical measure of the author's style to be obtained.

But painstaking men were doing this many years ago, long before computers were invented. All that computers do is to make the process easier, and faster. In an article on the use of computers to analyse authors' styles, a famous scientist concluded with a very sound warning:

"No statistical analysis ever proves anything to be absolutely true. When given the necessary data, however, it can say which of the two alternatives is the more likely to be correct."<sup>18</sup>

In other words, this sort of thing cannot establish facts. It can only estimate probabilities.

By drawing conclusions from arguments based on style, higher critics are not only disregarding this warning. They are committing a much more serious error. This is their method:

First, they assume that the Bible is not verbally inspired. They have to assume this before they can start. Nobody knows what the operation of the Holy Spirit would do to a man's literary style, so if you want to base conclusions on an analysis of style you simply must rule out the possibility of the Spirit affecting your results.

Right. You assume "no inspiration". You do your analysis. You find differences in style between the Letter to the Galatians and the Letter to the Ephesians. You say: "Therefore Paul didn't write them both. But the Bible says he did. Therefore the Bible can't be verbally inspired."

This is merely arguing in a circle. Starting with an assumption, you end up by concluding what you had first assumed. Any scientist doing that sort of thing would soon find himself looking for another job.

Surely there is only one sane approach to the question of style in the Bible. Leave it alone. It proves little in an ordinary book, and proves nothing at all in a book claiming to be inspired.

### **A Critic Takes a Tumble**

In the early days, higher critics spoke with boundless confidence of their methods. Instead of admitting that they were mixing a little evidence With a lot of guesswork and a sprinkling of prejudice, they made claims like this:

"Higher criticism itself is neutral; it has no bias; it is a scientific process."<sup>19</sup>

Since those days most of them have mellowed a bit. But as recently as 1943 one of them could still write about critical theories:

“These things are not in doubt; they are not hypothetical reconstructions or tentative suggestions, but truths as assured as anything ever can be in the sphere of literary research.”<sup>20</sup>

Over-confident assertions like these are astonishing, when you think of all the hard knocks that various higher critics have had to take. The sad story of a professor who tried to win a lawsuit by using the methods of higher criticism has been told by A. J. Pollock:

“A literary lady in Canada, Miss Florence Deeks, wrote the story of the part women have played in history, under the title of ‘The Web’, and lodged her manuscript in the keeping of the Canadian branch of the well-known publishing house of Macmillan in Toronto.

“A few months later appeared ‘The Outline of History’ by Mr H. G. Wells, published also by Macmillan, but from their London office.

“When Miss Deeks read the ‘Outline of History’, she was struck by the fact that Mr Wells had introduced ideas and incidents, which also appeared in her book, and that many of the phrases were common to both. She came to the conclusion that Mr Wells must have had access to her manuscript and was guilty of gross plagiarism.

“Seeing that there was no proof that Mr Wells had seen the manuscript of ‘The Web’, a means of convincing a court of law that plagiarism had really happened must be discovered. Why not try the methods employed by the Higher Critics? Why not get an expert of wide experience on these lines? So Miss Deeks took her case to the Rev. W. A. Irwin, M.A., B.D., PH.D., at that time an associate professor of Ancient and Old Testament Languages and Literature at Toronto University, afterwards Professor of Old Testament Languages and Literature at Chicago University. The Professor in accepting the task said:

‘I consented in considerable measure because this is the sort of task with which my study of ancient literature repeatedly confronts me, and I was interested to test out in modern works the methods commonly applied to those of the ancient world.’

“So he diligently pursued his task, and at length formulated his ‘assured results’ in much detail, proving, as he claimed, that Mr Wells had access to Miss Deeks’ manuscript, that he had made free use of it, and had been guilty of considerable plagiarism.

“Miss Deeks then brought action against Mr H. G. Wells and the Macmillan publishers in a Canadian court, claiming ~500,000, or about £100,000 damages.

“This court dismissed the case. Miss Deeks, not satisfied, carried her case to a Court of Appeal, but with the same result. Miss Deeks then carried the case to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, London, the highest legal tribunal in the British Empire. Again and finally the case was given in favour of Mr H. G. Wells and the Macmillan publishers.

“At these trials it was sworn on oath that Miss Deeks’ manuscript had never been in the hands of Mr H. G. Wells, that it had remained in secure custody in the safe of the Macmillan Company in Toronto, that no copy of the manuscript in part or whole had been made, that in short no leakage of information had taken place, and that Mr H. G. Wells did not even know of the existence of the manuscript. The verdict of the House of Lords was unanimous in dismissing the case.

“What must have been the feelings of the Rev. W. A. Irwin, M.A., B.D., PH.D., when he heard one of the Canadian judges, The Hon. Mr Justice Riddell, a well-known legal luminary,

famous throughout Canada and the United States, describing his 'assured results' with such epithets as the following, 'Fantastic Hypotheses', 'Solemn Nonsense', 'Comparisons without significance', 'Arguments and conclusions alike puerile'. Professor Irwin was in a splendid position to arrive at 'assured results' when he had before him both documents in question, and both of recent dates; whereas the critics deal with very ancient documents, generally written in dead languages. If Professor Irwin failed so lamentably in the case of what was comparatively easy, what chance have the 'assured results' relating to the Ancient Scriptures of being anything else than 'solemn nonsense' and 'fantastic hypotheses'?"<sup>21</sup>

### A Last Look at the Old Testament Scene

Since World War II, critical scholars have generally been less confident and more humble about their field of study. One of the most eminent and most moderate of them, Professor H. H. Rowley, has summed up the situation like this:

"When the Society for Old Testament Study was formed, during the First World War, there was a broad agreement amongst the scholars of the world on a large number of questions concerning this book. . . Today the whole scene is changed, and the student of the Old Testament is living in a very different climate. We have passed through a generation of activity, and even of excitement, in the study of the Bible that could not have been foreseen. *Many of the conclusions that seemed most sure have been challenged*, and there is now a greater variety of view on many questions than has been known for a long time. It is therefore much more dangerous and misleading today to speak of the consensus of scholarship on many questions than it was . . . In contrast to the large measure of unity that prevailed a generation ago, there is today an almost bewildering diversity of views on many questions . . . contrary tendencies have appeared in various quarters leading to a greater fluidity in the field as a whole than has been known for a long time. In the field of Higher Criticism various tendencies have appeared. . . It is here that the greatest fluidity in the whole field of Old Testament Study is to be found today, though *it cannot be said that any agreed pattern is emerging from the welter of challenge to the older views.*"<sup>22</sup> (The italics are mine.)

Thus Professor Rowley was refreshingly frank and honest. He warned his readers that there were bags of exciting ideas and suggestions floating around, but not so many facts. The Bible-criticising scholars could not agree on much -except to disagree with the Bible-believing community. And they were not even so sure about that as they used to be, for the professor also said:

"In general, it may be said that there has been a tendency towards more conservative views on many questions than were common at the opening of our period. These more conservative views are not shared by all scholars, though they are widespread . .

Twenty years have passed since Professor Rowley made these frank admissions. But the position today is still more or less the same. Old Testament higher critics still disagree vigorously and accuse each other of bad scholarship. The following remark by A. Sperber, Professor of Hebrew at The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, is typical of the present situation:

"It is high time that Bible scholars . . . approach the Bible not as schoolmasters teaching the prophets how Hebrew sentences should be formed and Hebrew words spelled, but as humble students of these great masters of Hebrew."<sup>23</sup>

Critical scholars of the Old Testament are evidently still groping in the dark. To use Professor Rowley's word, the situation is still "fluid", with no solid facts that could overturn the faith of a Bible believer.

### **The New Testament**

With the New Testament the situation is much simpler. These books belong to the first century A.D. Historians know a great deal about this period. Here we have a great many more facts, and there is far less scope for guesswork.

In the nineteenth century it was not so. In those days the oldest manuscripts available had been written in the fourth century. The critics were able to speculate that at least some of the original books could have been written after the supposed authors were dead. Needless to say, they made the most of their opportunity. All sorts of fancy theories about various New Testament books were trotted out.

Today the situation is very different. A number of much more ancient manuscripts have come to light, which have killed many of the nineteenth-century theories stone dead. Of course, boys will be boys, and critics will be critics; nothing will stop the critical scholars from speculating entirely, but today their speculations about the New Testament are mainly directed into other channels. The dates of most of the New Testament books are now regarded as fairly well fixed.

For example, R. M. Grant is an eminent scholar of critical leanings. Yet he states as a fact that Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians was written "about A.D. 54".<sup>24</sup> Jesus was crucified in about A.D. 30. Consequently, 1 Corinthians, with its very powerful testimony to the resurrection of Jesus<sup>25</sup> was written within a third of a lifetime of the crucifixion-while a large proportion of the eye-witnesses of Christ's resurrection were still living!

The change has been brought about largely by the discovery of several New Testament manuscripts written in the second century. We need not bother with the reasons that have led scholars to decide on the dates of these manuscripts. Archaeological dating is a highly technical subject. It involves studying the ink, the "paper" (or rather, its ancient equivalents), the style of writing, and other features of the manuscript. In addition, modern physics enables radiocarbon tests to be made on tiny portions of the manuscript, and these help to confirm the archaeological studies.

It would be a waste of time to discuss this evidence, because there is nothing very controversial about it. The evidence is so clear that all scholars are agreed on the date of these manuscripts to within a few years or so.

The first of the new manuscripts came to light in 1931. They are called the Chester Beatty Papyri, after the man who acquired most of them. Three of them contain fifteen of the twenty-seven New Testament books. Unfortunately they are in a rather tatty condition, like most ancient books. Many bits and pieces are missing. But there is more than enough material to date them accurately. One of them was written about A.D. 200; the other two were written not long after.

This discovery was soon followed by news of an even older manuscript. It was found in Egypt and had lain in the John Rylands Library, Manchester, since 1920. But nobody realised what a treasure it was until C. H. Roberts studied it, and announced his findings in 1935. It was only a little scrap of papyrus, three and a half inches long by two and a quarter inches wide, with a few verses of John's Gospel 'written on both sides. It was evidently all that was left of a complete

Gospel of John. And it was written before A.D. 150.

This was, and still is, the oldest piece of New Testament ever discovered. The John Rylands Librarian, Dr. Guppy, went wild with excitement. He declared that it must have been written “when the ink of the original autograph can hardly have been dry” (!) It is easy to forgive him for his slight exaggeration.

Also in 1935 some scholars in the British Museum published details of a much larger papyrus fragment. This was not a piece of the Bible, but a collection of early Christian writings. It included a portion of a “Life of Christ”, sometimes called “the fifth gospel”. This was obviously written by a man who had access to copies of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John and used all four of them in his own writings. It also was written before A.D. 150.

These finds are of tremendous importance. Books had to be copied laboriously by hand in those days. They spread very slowly from land to land. During the first half of the second century men were reading the Gospel of John in Egypt, and they were studying all four gospels in at least one place. Consequently the originals simply must have been written before the end of the first century; perhaps quite a long time before.

The evidence of these twentieth-century manuscript discoveries is strongly supported by two other lines of evidence: (1) ancient translations into other languages and (2) quotations from early Christian ‘writers. Much of this supplementary evidence was already available in the nineteenth century, but it was brushed under the carpet by those who did not want to see it. Nowadays, however, it is recognised at its true worth.

Although we have no very early manuscripts of the New Testament in languages other than Greek, we have evidence that very early translations did exist. In A.D. 180 the Christians in North Africa were being persecuted. We possess the record of the trial of some Christians in the town of Scillium. They admitted keeping some “books, and letters of Paul”. Since their language was Latin it appears that the Latin New Testament was already widespread by A.D. 180.

We also possess many documents in Syriac, which refer to a document called the *Diatessaron*. They tell us that this was written in Syriac by a man called Tatian in about A.D. 170. It was a book in which all four gospels were woven together into one continuous narrative. So it seems that Syriac translations of the gospels were in use well before A.D. 170.

A Christian leader in Rome called Clement wrote a letter to the Corinthian church in about A.D. 96. In it he referred to the letter that “the blessed Paul the apostle” had previously written to them (our 1 Corinthians). He quoted from this and other New Testament books.

Two other Christian documents written just after A.D. 100 quote extensively from New Testament books. They are called, “The Epistle of Barnabas”, and, “The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles”.<sup>26</sup>

These lines of evidence point to an unmistakable conclusion. Most of our New Testament books *must* have been written in the first century; the remainder *could* have been.

In a book devoted to the New Testament manuscripts, an internationally respected scholar, Professor F. F. Bruce, sums up the situation like this:

“The New Testament was complete, or substantially complete, about A.D. 100, the majority of the writings being in existence twenty to forty years before this. In this country [Britain] a majority of modern scholars fix the dates of the four Gospels as follows:

Matthew, about 85-90; Mark, about 65; Luke, about 80-85; John, about 90-100. I should be

inclined to date the first three Gospels rather earlier: Mark shortly after A.D. 60, Luke between 60 and 70, and Matthew shortly after 70....

“But even with the later dates, the situation is still encouraging from the historian’s point of view, for the first three Gospels were written at a time when many were alive who could remember the things that Jesus said and did, and some at least would still be alive when the fourth Gospel was written.

“The dates of the thirteen Pauline epistles can be fixed partly by internal and partly by external evidence. The day has gone by when the authenticity of these letters could be denied wholesale. There are some writers today who would reject Ephesians; fewer would reject ~ Thessalonians; more would deny that the Pastoral Epistles (1 and 2 Timothy and Titus) came in their present form from the hand of Paul. I accept them all as Pauline. The remaining eight letters . . . [he goes on to imply that these eight are now accepted generally as actually written by Paul].”<sup>27</sup>

But I will reserve the last word on this subject for another scholar whose opinions carried weight throughout the world, the late Sir Frederic Kenyon, former Director of the British Museum:

“The New Testament books stand in a very strong position, the strength of which has been increased by recent discoveries and investigations. Short of the discovery of first-century manuscripts, their traditional first-century dates are confirmed by as strong evidence as is reasonable to expect.”<sup>28</sup>

## Summing Up

So there, very briefly, are the facts.

There are two schools of thought about the Old Testament. The majority of scholars think it was written at a relatively late date, by men other than the authors named in the Bible. A smaller body of scholars, some of them eminent in their field, take the opposite view. They think that there is reason to believe what the Old Testament tells us about its authors.

The evidence is nearly all of a vague and inconclusive character. There are few really solid facts bearing on the question. The wisest verdict for anyone to give at the present time is, as we say in Scotland, “Not proven”.

In view of this we can well afford to give the Lord Jesus Christ the casting vote. He accepted that the Old Testament was written by the men named as its authors. There is no reason why we should not do the same.

With the New Testament there is much less uncertainty. The bulk of modern scholars agree that most of it was written in the first century. Some think a few books were not written until the second century, but the evidence for this view is not at all conclusive.

This means that most of the New Testament books were almost certainly written by the men whose names appear on them. And there is no real reason to deny that the remaining books were written by their stated authors, either.

### ***How did the Bible Come Down to Us?***

Mentioning the Bible to some people is like waving a red rag at a bull.

“The Bible!” snorted one such gentleman. “Who cares about the Bible? Why should we take any notice of a book like that?”

“Just look at its history. Written so long ago that nobody knows who wrote it. Copied and re-copied until no one knows how much it has changed with time. Translated so often that you can take your pick of a dozen English versions—all different. And when you’ve got it, you can interpret it to mean almost anything you like.”

“In any case,” he said as an afterthought, “how did they choose the books to go into the Bible? Pick them out with a pin?”

Although his language was not very courteous, this man was expressing some very real problems. I have dealt with his first question

-authorship-in the previous chapter. That leaves the following problems:

(1) *Copying*. Our oldest manuscripts are, at best, only copies of the original writings. Much more probably they are copies of copies, or maybe copies of copies of copies of copies. Some of the more recent copies may have come down through ten or twenty copyists’ hands. What guarantee have we that our best copies are not full of copyists’ mistakes? And what’s the use of believing that God inspired every word of the original writings, when we certainly cannot rely upon every word of our existing copies?

(2) *Selection*. Our Bible contains sixty-six books, beginning at Genesis and going on to Revelation. Why those sixty-six and no others? Who chose them, and when, and how? And the Roman Catholic Bible contains some extra books; why are they not included in the Protestant Bible?

(3) *Translation*. Most of us have to read the Bible in English and cannot understand the Hebrew and Greek in which it was written. Millions of other people rely on translations into Chinese, or Swedish, or Swahili, or some other of the thousand-odd languages in which the Bible is available. But books lose something when they are translated. What was the point of God’s inspiring the words of the Bible, when those words have all had to be changed in translation?

(4) *Interpretation*. There is only one Bible. Yet there are dozens of different sects, all interpreting the Bible to prove themselves right. What use is a book that is supposed to be inspired of God, if it is worded so vaguely that men can make it mean what they like?

These are all perfectly reasonable questions. We must face them honestly and see how far we can go towards solving them.

### **How Good were the Copyists?**

Take first the Jews who copied the manuscripts of the Old Testament. There is only one word to describe the quality of their work:  
magnificent.

A group of Jewish officials called the Massorettes drew up a set of rules for copying out

Bibles (that is, Old Testaments). Their work was in full swing by the sixth century A.D., but we know that Jewish copyists were incredibly painstaking long before those days. It just happens that we have details of the rules of the Massoretes.

Another service the Massoretes performed for us was to fix the pronunciation of the Old Testament. Even in English there are some words whose meaning depends upon the pronunciation. The word, LEAD, for instance. This has one meaning in "Lead me to it", and another meaning in "heavy as lead". We decide from the way the word is used whether to pronounce it "led" or "leed", and that decides the meaning.

There are many more pronunciation problems in Hebrew, because the language has hardly any vowels. If there were a word, LEAD, in Hebrew it would just be spelt LD. So we should not only have to decide between the two forms of "lead"; we should need to consider the possibility of "lid", "lad", "laid", "load", and "loud", also.

When Hebrew is your mother tongue this creates very few difficulties. The inhabitants of Tel Aviv read their Hebrew newspapers without vowels quite happily. But the Massoretes left nothing to chance. They added pronunciation marks (called "vowel points") to every word.

In 999 words out of a thousand their pronunciation marks are obviously right. In the thousandth case, scholars sometimes wonder if the Massoretes got the pronunciation, and hence the meaning of the word, wrong.

The Jews had always recognised the importance of having one standard copy of the Old Testament from which they worked. There are a number of references to this standard copy in ancient Jewish books,<sup>1</sup> as well as in the Old Testament.<sup>2</sup>

In earlier days the Jews had kept their standard copy of the Scriptures in the temple in Jerusalem. We have a standard weight in London called the Imperial Standard Pound. Until Britain began to go metric it was the ultimate standard against which every grocer's scale in Britain was checked. In much the same way, all the earlier copies of the Hebrew Bible were checked for accuracy against the standard copy in Jerusalem.

That standard copy was carried in triumph to Rome when the Romans destroyed the temple in A.D. 70. For the next five centuries the Jews were without a standard. Then, by comparing all the copies available to them, the Massoretes were able to recreate a standard copy. They then drew up their rules to ensure that the new standard was copied accurately.

Just one example from those rules will illustrate their severity. The Massoretes drew up tables, one for each book of the Bible, showing how many times each letter occurred. Such a table would run like this:

This book contains so-many alephs (A's) so-many beths (B's)  
-and so on, to the end of the alphabet.

When a scribe had finished copying out a book, he had to count up the letters in it and compare his scores with those in the table. If he was one out, on one letter, he was supposed to scrap the whole book and start again. (Human nature being what it is, you can't help wondering if he always did!)

Scholars tell us that Hebrew manuscripts all over the world are extraordinarily similar, thanks to these stringent rules of the Massoretes.

This leaves unanswered one serious question. The Massorettes recreated a standard copy, four or five hundred years after the Romans took away the original standard. How do we know that the new standard was anything like the old?

Until 1947 it was impossible to answer that question. The oldest Hebrew scrolls belonged to about the tenth century A.D., and were therefore based on the standard Massoretic text. Apart from a few fragments we had no pre-Massoretic manuscripts with which to compare them.

In 1947 the first of the Dead Sea Scrolls were found. These were manuscripts of Old Testament books and other Jewish religious writings that were hidden away in caves just before A.D. 70. The Roman legions were marching through the land, and the Jewish monks who owned these books hid them away "for the duration of the war". Alas, they never came back to claim their property. Few Jews escaped being killed or deported, and the monks' treasures lay in their hiding places for nearly nineteen centuries.

To the Bible student the two most interesting scrolls are copies of the book of Isaiah. One, known as 1Q Isaiah A, is complete; the other, 1Q Isaiah B, is incomplete. It appears that one of these is a higher quality product than the other.

A chemist today would buy an expensive, accurate copy of the Imperial Standard Pound (or, more probably, of the Standard Kilogram); a grocer would buy a cheap copy, not very accurate, but quite good enough for weighing potatoes. In the same way it seems clear that 1Q Isaiah B was a high-quality copy of the Standard Scroll, prepared perhaps for some large, rich synagogue; while 1Q Isaiah A was a less accurate copy, turned out by less skilled scribes for the use, probably, of less important people.

According to a leading authority these and other Dead Sea Scrolls confirm "that the Jewish scribes of the early Christian centuries copied and recopied the text of the Hebrew Bible with the utmost fidelity".<sup>3</sup>

Even the less accurate scroll, 1Q Isaiah A, differs from the Massoretic text in only a few small particulars. 1Q Isaiah B is "as close to the traditional Massoretic text as makes no practical difference".<sup>4</sup>

We obviously owe the painstaking Jewish scribes a great debt. They have bequeathed us a Hebrew Bible that is very, very close indeed to the words that were first written.

### **The New Testament Copyists**

One sad fact has to be faced. The Christian copyists were not in the same street as their Jewish colleagues. If they had been we should have a superbly accurate text of the New Testament, because there are two points in favour of the New Testament copies.

First, the New Testament manuscripts go back much closer to the originals than do the Old Testament manuscripts. And secondly, there is a wider variety of New Testament manuscript evidence to draw upon.

As it is, these two great advantages just about compensate for the relative inaccuracy of the Christian scribes. For it was only *relative* inaccuracy. They were not at all bad copyists; they just could not attain the fantastically high standards of the Jews.

The great age of the oldest New Testament manuscripts was discussed in the previous

chapter. The other advantage, of great abundance of material, is equally important.

There are something like 5,000 separate manuscripts of the Greek New Testament in the museums and libraries of the world. Some are only fragments, but many are practically complete. Also there are a great many early copies of the New Testament translated into other languages. In addition to this, a very large part of the New Testament exists in the form of quotations in early Christian writings.

A nineteenth-century scholar, Dean Burgon, counted up all these early quotations that he could find. He reported 19,370 quotations from the Gospels, 14,905 from the Epistles, 1,387 from the Acts of the Apostles and 644 from the book of Revelation.<sup>5</sup> A present-day recount would reveal much larger numbers.

You may wonder what use all these manuscripts are if none of them is accurate. The answer is that by comparing them it is possible to sort out most of the errors, and recover a nearly accurate text. This is very tedious work but it can be done. Fortunately for us, thousands of dedicated men over the past four centuries have given the best years of their lives to this work.

There are two kinds of errors: deliberate ones, and accidental ones. The insertion of the second sentence into 1 John 5: 7, is regarded as a deliberate corruption of the text. Some scribe apparently thought he could improve John's writing. The spurious nature of this sentence, which appears in the Authorised Version, was discovered a very long time ago. It is omitted from all modern versions.

Accidental slips are often harder to locate, but there are techniques for finding them. Names are given to the different kinds of mistakes that can occur. Most of these are almost impossible for the ordinary man to remember. One common form of error is called "homoeoteleuton" (from the Greek for "same ending"). If the same word occurs, say, at the end of line 3 and the end of line 4, it is very easy for the copyist to jump from the end of line 3 to the beginning of line 4. If he does, then that is a homoeoteleuton. Fortunately, it is usually easier to spot where a homoeoteleuton has occurred than to remember what it is called.

Another form of error, also easy to detect, has an unforgettable name: dittography. No prizes are offered for guessing that it means accidentally writing the same word twice.

It soon becomes clear to the scholar working in this field that there are good manuscripts and bad manuscripts. He is able to divide them up into families, and say fairly confidently, for example, that manuscripts X, Y and Z are all copies of the same earlier manuscript. Gradually he ends up with a text which he knows to be more than 99 per cent perfect. That is to say, he is practically certain of the complete accuracy of most of it.

Just occasionally there is a word or a phrase about which he cannot be sure. If he is a Bible translator he will probably indicate his uncertainty in a footnote. For example, Mark 1: 34 tells us that Jesus "suffered not the devils to speak because they knew Him". The Revised Version of 1885 translates these words in exactly the same way as the Authorised Version. But it tells us in a footnote that after the last word, "many ancient authorities [manuscripts] add 'to be Christ'."

This is fairly typical of the uncertainties that exist in the text of our Greek New Testament. They are generally few and far between. They are generally small. And they generally have little effect on the meaning of the passages in question.

How do these small uncertainties affect the question of inspiration? We must consider that later. But first I want to look at another question.

### **Drawing the Line**

At some time or another somebody-or a number of somebodies-must have drawn a line. On one side of that line they placed the sixty-six books that make up our Bible. On the other side of the line they left all the other books in the world. The line they drew is usually called "the canon of Scripture", because "canon" is an old-fashioned name for a measuring rule or an approved list.

"Take these sixty-six books, and these alone," they must have said. "These books are the inspired Word of God. All the other books ever written, or likely to be written, are in a different class altogether. All other books are just the writings of ordinary men and women."

We need to know how this tremendous decision came to be made. Otherwise we shall not know whether to trust the decision-makers. We need good reasons before we can feel sure that the line was drawn in exactly the right place. What, then, are the facts?

As with so many other questions about the Bible, the first fact is this: the scholars disagree. There are two main schools of thought.

The first school maintains that the Bible "just grewed", like that famous young lady called Topsy. The majority of modern scholars belong to the Topsy school. Put very briefly, their theory runs like this:

For thousands of years men have been churning out religious books by the cartload. Some of these have been written from scratch, others by tinkering with older books that looked as if they could do with a rewrite. Gradually men began to realise that some of these books were of outstanding merit, just as men regard Shakespeare's plays as being the greatest English literature ever written.

At first the Jews were not unanimous in their choice of the very best religious books. They argued for years and years before making their final choice. By the time of Christ they were almost agreed on which books constituted the Word of God. But some haggling still went on over a few books.

The matter was finally settled in about A.D. 90 by the Jewish religious council, known as the Sanhedrin. This held a great many debates on religious matters during the years after A.D. 70. Its meetings during this period are often called the Council of Jamnia, after the town near Jaffa in Israel where they were held.

It is possible that the rabbis did not make any formal proclamation of their findings until later. But from that time onwards the Jews never seriously questioned the canon of Scripture. Their Bible remained exactly the same as our Old Testament.

Meanwhile, the early Christian Church was busy building up its own collection of sacred books. Some of these came to be recognised as outstanding, and Christians began to add these to their Jewish Old Testament, which they already accepted as the Word of God. But it took a long time before the early Church finally made up its mind about the canon of the New Testament.

The last word was not spoken until A.D. 393 at another committee meeting, the Synod of Hippo. And even then it was thought necessary for another meeting in A.D. 397, the Third Synod of Carthage, to confirm the ruling. From then on the New Testament has been fixed in the form in which we have it today.

Put like that, the situation does not look too good. But there are two sides to every story. Another group of scholars takes a very different line.

They say that the Topsy theory simply does not fit the facts. The Bible is altogether too remarkable a book, and too much of a united whole, to have emerged in this haphazard fashion. They consider that the following theory fits the facts much better:

When a man had been used by God to write an inspired book he must have been aware of that fact. His immediate associates would probably be guided by God to recognise that this was indeed an inspired book. Thus the line would have been drawn immediately each inspired book was written. The canon of Scripture would have been built up, book by book, as time went by. It grew, but it did not *just* grow. It grew under the guiding hand of God.

If this is what happened, why were there ever any arguments about it? This can be explained quite simply. Some of the objectors might not have been aware of the true facts, just as Thomas argued about Christ's resurrection because he had missed seeing the proof for himself.<sup>6</sup> Others would have been men of the kind you sometimes meet on committees today, men who love to overturn a decision already made.

How can we choose between these two theories?

It is no use simply plumping for the majority view. As this book has shown repeatedly, in matters affecting human emotions, and particularly in religious questions, majority opinions are very often wrong. We need to look carefully at the facts behind the theories before coming to a decision.

But before we do so, let me utter a word of caution. This is a subject where prejudice—mine, and yours, and all the scholars'—plays a part. If we dismiss the idea of anything miraculous happening, if we reject the Bible's claim to be verbally inspired—if this is our outlook we shall be hopelessly prejudiced against the second theory. We shall cling to the Topsy theory like drowning men to a life raft, because we have left ourselves no alternative.

But as I shall show in Chapter 21, it is more scientific to accept the possibility of miracles than to reject it. And we have already seen in Chapters 14 to 16 that there is good reason to believe in the verbal inspiration of the Bible. So there is nothing impossible about the idea of God's Spirit supervising the process of collecting together His own books.

Now let's take a closer look at the historical facts.

### **The Old Testament Canon**

History—that is ordinary history, not the historical records inside the Bible itself—can tell us practically nothing about the very early days of the Old Testament books. The Scriptures of the Jews were completed by the fifth century B.C. They were already ancient literature before they came to the notice of the outside world.

In the three centuries before Christ there were many Greek-speaking Jews living outside the

land of Israel, especially in Egypt. During the third and second centuries B.C. they gradually produced for themselves a translation of the Bible into Greek. This has come to be known as the "Septuagint" (or LXX, for short) because of a ridiculous legend about its production by seventy-two men in seventy-two days. (*Septuaginta* is the Latin word for "seventy".)

It is not an ideal translation, because its accuracy varies from place to place. But for want of anything better the early Greek-speaking Christians quickly adopted it as their own. We owe its preservation to these Christians rather than its original proprietors, the Jews.

During the period 300 B.C. to A.D. 100 a large number of Jewish religious books was written. None of these was accepted as Scripture by the Jews of Jerusalem, but the Jews of Alexandria translated a few of them into Greek and tacked them on to their Septuagint. This small collection of later books is called the "Apocrypha". Perhaps "tacked them on" is a misleading phrase; in those days a large book like the Bible would be in the form of a whole series of separate rolls kept in one place. Books more like ours, made from flat sheets stitched together, were not invented until after the time of Christ. (This sort of book is called a "codex".) But when the Septuagint appeared in this form the books of the Apocrypha were bound among the Old Testament books.

Why this happened remains a mystery. Some scholars think that the Greek-speaking Jews accepted these newer books as inspired, but this has never been proved. If they did hold such a view it was certainly a highly unorthodox opinion.

The Jews in general, and the Jews of Jerusalem in particular, had long regarded the canon of Scripture as closed. We know this from the writings of two famous Jews, Philo and Josephus, who lived in the first century A.D. What they wrote about the canon was worded in rather vague terms, so we cannot prove conclusively that they accepted the usual thirty-nine Old Testament books.

But one thing is quite certain. They both believed very firmly that the canon of Scripture was complete, and had been so for a long time. They did not express this as a personal view, but as the orthodox Jewish belief.

It therefore seems unlikely that the Greek-speaking Jews of Alexandria (of whom Philo was one) regarded the Apocrypha as God's Word. Their habit of keeping these other books along with the Old Testament books probably has another explanation. I once possessed an English Bible which included the Book of Common Prayer. But this was bound in with the Bible just for convenience. Nobody ever regarded the Prayer Book as inspired. The Alexandrian Jews probably regarded the Apocrypha as useful books to keep along with the Bible, and nothing more.

It is practically certain that the early church did not regard the Apocrypha as a part of the Bible. The writers of the New Testament quote the Old Testament *as Scripture* more than 200 times. That is to say, they introduce each of these 200-odd quotations by, "Thus saith the Scripture", or, "As it is written", or some such phrase. Yet never once do they quote the Apocrypha in this fashion. This strongly implies that the Bible Jesus used contained the same thirty-nine books as our Old Testament.

The only difference (apart from language) between Christ's Bible and our Old Testament is the order of the books. They both start with Genesis, but our Old Testament ends with Malachi while the Jewish one ends with 2 Chronicles. So did Christ's Old Testament. When he wanted to refer to all the martyrs of the Old Testament, He said:

“The blood of all the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the world, may be required of this generation; from the blood of Abel unto the blood of Zacharias.”<sup>7</sup>

Abel was the first martyr mentioned in the Jewish Old Testament (Genesis 4), and Zachariah was the last (2 Chronicles 24). There are lots of martyrs mentioned in the Apocrypha as coming after Zachariah, but Christ disregarded all these.

In the light of this evidence it seems highly probably that the canon of the Old Testament was fixed long before the time of Christ. As numerous scholars have pointed Out, the Jewish Council of Jamnia did not try to decide a new question, but merely to prevent a longsettled question from being reopened<sup>8</sup>

Nevertheless the question was reopened-but not by the Jews. The early Christian Church used the Greek version of the Old Testament, and, as we have seen, this had the books of the Apocrypha bound up with it. This caused some Christians to think that perhaps the Apocrypha was part of the inspired Bible. Others strongly disagreed.

The question was debated for many centuries. It was settled for Roman Catholics in 1546, when the Council of Trent declared the Apocrypha to be fully inspired. The Protestant churches never accepted this view, but have always kept to the original Jewish decision about the canon of the Old Testament.

The Roman Church's attempt to introduce the Apocrypha into the Old Testament as late as 1546 went against the facts of history. It also went against the teaching of the New Testament. Paul said:

“What advantage then hath the Jew? . . . They were entrusted with the Oracles of God [the Old Testament].”<sup>9</sup>

Thus it was the responsibility of the Jews, said Paul, to look after the Old Testament. Neither the Roman Catholic Church nor anybody else, has any right to overrule the Jewish decision about the Old Testament canon.

### **The New Testament Canon**

Unlike the Old Testament, the books of the New Testament were mentioned by outside writers-lots of them-while the New Testament was still young. Because of this we know that at least twenty out of its twenty-seven books were accepted as Scripture by practically the whole Church at an early date.<sup>10</sup> Just how early we cannot be sure, but it was probably by A.D. 150, and could have been considerably earlier.<sup>11</sup>

The remaining seven books are Hebrews, Revelation, James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, and Jude. The first two of these are substantial books, but the other five are all brief. Consequently all seven books together make up only about one eighth of the entire New Testament.

It was only this small fraction of the New Testament that was ever seriously disputed. The historical record of these disputes, and their final silencing at the Synod of Hippo in A.D. 393, is

not complete. Some of the books were rejected by some of the churches for some of the time. That is about as good a summary of the story as is available today.

There are at least three reasons why wise historians are cautious about this subject:

(1) New facts crop up from time to time which throw a new light on the situation. For example, Professor Ridderbos pointed out in 1958 that new evidence about the Epistle to the Hebrews had just been discovered.<sup>12</sup> It was now known that this book was accepted as Scripture in Rome as early as A.D. 150. Previously all that was known was that Hebrews was still not accepted in Rome at a much later date. Why this book should have been “in,” “out,” and then, finally “in” again, is not known. But this story shows the dangers of jumping to conclusions. If this case is anything to go by, other books among the disputed seven could have been accepted in the very early days, and then rejected by some men at a later date.

(2) The Church in those days was not a closely knit community. Individual churches were separated by great distances, and in times of war and persecution communications were very poor. What was going on in one place may have been quite unrepresentative and misleading, if assumed to apply to the Church over a wide area.

(3) It is the Church leaders that have left their mark on history, not the rank-and-file Christians. We may know what some of the early bishops thought about the disputed books. But we have no means of telling what the lesser brethren thought. And where there is a difference of opinion within a church, it is not always the leaders who are right. Whose opinions, for instance, are right in Russia today? Those of the few well-known church leaders who have come to terms with the state? Or the unknown thousands who suffer in prison and concentration camp for the sake of an uncompromising faith? God knows.

Evidently the Topsy theory—that the canon of Scripture “just grewed”—is not borne out by the facts of history. Neither is the alternative theory. The historical evidence is incomplete and inconclusive. Either theory could be true, so far as the historical evidence goes.

This gives us a clear field, then, to look at the internal evidence. Let the Bible speak for itself, and tell its own tale of the formation of the canon.

### **The Bible's Own Evidence**

Throughout the Bible, from Moses the first author to John the last, we are repeatedly told how the canon was formed. Dr. Bullinger has compiled a chain of thirty-two such passages running through the Old Testament from Exodus to Malachi,<sup>13</sup> and his list is far from exhaustive. Some, but by no means all, of the passages quoted below are taken from his collection.

The story begins in the book of Exodus. Moses went up into Mount Sinai. He talked with the Lord, and finally:

“Moses wrote all the words of the Lord. . . . And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people.”<sup>14</sup>

There was no doubt about this being the beginning of the canon. No other man had ever had an experience like this. No book like this had ever been written before. Moses had a conversation with God, and then wrote a permanent record of it. In a very direct sense, this beginning of Scripture was the Word of God.

By and by Moses added to his book:

“These are the journeys of the children of Israel . . . And Moses wrote their goings out according to their journeys by the commandment of the Lord.”<sup>15</sup>

He knew that his own writings were on a special plane. They were unlike any other writings. They were God's commandments. Consequently no man must touch them. Nothing must be added, nothing taken away:

“Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you.”<sup>16</sup>

This law of God that Moses was writing was very precious. It would have to be kept very, very carefully. So a group of custodians were appointed:

“When he (your future king) sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, he shall write him a copy of this law in a book, out of *that which is before the priests the Levites.*”<sup>17</sup>

“And Moses wrote this law and *delivered it unto the priests the sons of Levi*, which bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord.”<sup>18</sup>

“And it came to pass, when Moses had made an end of writing the words of this law in a book until they were finished, that Moses commanded the Levites, which bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord, saying, ‘*Take this book of the law) and put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there for a witness against thee!*’ “<sup>19</sup>

So the collection of holy writings began. Moses wrote the first portions, and handed them over to the priests. They placed them reverently beside the ark of the covenant; that is, in the Most Holy Place of the tabernacle, where the Spirit of God was known to dwell. Copies would be made from these, by future kings and others. But those scrolls kept in the tabernacle would always have the pride of place. The books admitted to that collection would form the canon of the Word of God.

But Moses was an old man. Soon he would die. Who, then, would carry on this work of giving God's Word to His people? Moses explained that this was provided for-God would appoint a successor:

“And the Lord said unto me ... ‘I will raise them up a prophet from among their brethren like unto thee. And I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him.’”<sup>20</sup>

The New Testament tells us that this promise was ultimately fulfilled by the coming of Jesus.<sup>21</sup> But there was also an immediate fulfilment. The next prophet after Moses, his immediate successor, was Joshua. This was very fitting, since Jesus and Joshua are the same name, one written in Greek and the other written in Hebrew.

As might be expected, Joshua added to the canon of Scripture. After the five books written by Moses, the next book bears Joshua's name. And the last chapter of that book tells us: “And Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God.”<sup>22</sup>

These words do not expressly say that he gave his book to the priests, to add to the collection in the Most Holy Place. But they clearly imply it. His words were written “in the book of the law of God”. This must surely mean that his book was an inspired addition to the law of God-to the

canon of Scripture.

A little later another prophet added to the sacred collection:

“Then Samuel ... wrote it in a book (Hebrew, “*the book*”) and *laid it up before the Lord.*”<sup>23</sup>

(To “lay a thing up before the Lord” meant, in Hebrew parlance, to deposit it in the tabernacle.)

Several centuries later a new king of the Jews was crowned:

“They (the priests) brought out the king’s son, and put upon him the crown, and *gave him the testimony*, and made him king.”<sup>24</sup>

What was this “testimony” they gave the new king? Certainly a copy of the Scriptures; probably the official standard copy, from which he was commanded to write out a copy for himself (see the passage [note 17] quoted on p.161.)

Prophet by prophet, book by book, the official collection grew. By the time of Jeremiah the earlier prophet Micah had been dead for a hundred years. But his written word had been immortalised in the sacred canon: Micah’s book was quoted by Jeremiah as a “Thus saith the Lord.”<sup>25</sup>

A hundred years later still, and Jeremiah’s own book had joined the great collection. One of the last of the prophets was quoting Jeremiah as a writer of “the Word of the Lord”:

“I, Daniel, understood by books (Hebrew, “*the books*”, presumably meaning the inspired books) the number of the years, whereof the Word of the Lord came to Jeremiah the prophet.”<sup>26</sup>

Not very long after this, Malachi gave his book to the priestly custodians and the Hebrew Word of God was complete. The day long foretold by Micah had arrived: the “sun had gone down over the prophets”.<sup>27</sup>

But night does not last for ever. As Malachi finished off the Old Testament canon, in the last half dozen verses of this last book, he promised that one day another “sun” would arise and a prophet of God would walk the earth again.<sup>28</sup>

### **The New Testament Speaks for Itself**

Four centuries passed by, four centuries of silence. And then Malachi’s promised “sun” appeared. “I am the Light of the world”,<sup>29</sup> He cried.

He chose twelve men to be His intimate companions for three years. He taught them all He could, and after three years He went away. But as He said good-bye to them, He gave them work to do. They were to be His witnesses to the whole world. And He would fill them with the Spirit, so that their witness would be a faithful one.<sup>30</sup>

The magnitude of their task must have frightened them. Witnesses to the whole world! How could eleven men witness to the world?

Years went by before they realised the answer. Only through the written word. That could be copied and multiplied, and carried to every corner of the earth. Slowly the implications must

have dawned upon them. After four hundred years God was going to reopen the canon of Scripture. There was going to be a New Testament, to follow the Old. God was going to inspire them to write it.

And write it they did, they and a few of their companions. They were evidently well aware that what they wrote was the inspired Word of God.

For one thing, they referred to each other's writings as "Scripture" -a word that otherwise they used only as a name for the Old Testament. Paul quoted from the Gospel of Luke, bracketing it with the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy, under the introduction, "The Scripture saith".<sup>31</sup> And Peter wrote of foolish men who mishandled both Paul's epistles and "the other Scriptures".<sup>32</sup>

On one occasion Paul declared that the book he was writing was the Word of the Lord: "If anyone claims to be inspired or a prophet, let him recognise that what I write has the Lord's authority."<sup>33</sup>

Look closely at that verse. It is interesting for another reason. It implies that there were some members of the early church who were endowed with a miraculous power. *They were able to recognise a new portion of Scripture when they saw it.*

There are several other references in the New Testament to this important power. It was obviously needed. How would banks get on unless they had men who could tell a forged banknote from the genuine article?

"In each of us the Spirit is manifested in one particular way, for some useful purpose. One man, through the Spirit, has the gift of wise speech, while another, by the power of the same Spirit, can put the deepest knowledge into words. Another, by the same Spirit, is granted faith; another, by the one Spirit, gifts of healing, and another miraculous powers; another has the gift of prophesy, and another *ability to distinguish true spirits from false.*"<sup>34</sup>

That ability to distinguish true spirits from false-that is, to distinguish men truly inspired by the Spirit of God from impostors-must have been in very frequent use. Paul refers to some men who were even sending out forged letters in his name.<sup>35</sup> Some men were pretending to speak inspired words and calling themselves apostles; John bluntly calls them "liars".<sup>36</sup>

With deceivers like this among them the churches were in danger. Both Paul and John urged them to be on their guard. The men empowered to recognise true prophets, and truly inspired books, were to keep busy:

"Do not stifle inspiration, and do not despise prophetic utterances, *but bring them all to the test.*"<sup>37</sup>

"But do not trust any and every spirit, my friends; *test the spirits*, to see whether they are from God, for among those who have gone out into the world *there are many prophets falsely inspired.*"<sup>38</sup>

Without these special people in the early Church, we should have no New Testament today. Unless they had been able to recognise true prophets, and true books of Scripture, the canon would never have been compiled. There would just have been a vast mountain of early Christian literature, and nobody would know which was Scripture and which was not.

In Chapter 10 we saw that there is a remarkable degree of harmony between all the books of the Bible. There are threads that run right through, telling one long consecutive story, as if one Master-mind behind the individual writers had planned it that way.

We now have another example of this. To build up the Bible's own explanation of how its canon came into existence we have had to bring together twenty-four different passages, like pearls on a thread. They come from nineteen separate books, by eleven different writers. And they all tell one clear, harmonious tale.

More than that. They also present us with a remarkable, and unexpected, parallel between the two Testaments.

In the Old Testament the writers of Scripture were the prophets. Its guardians, however, were the priests. A book was admitted to the canon of Scripture as soon as it had been (1) written by the prophet, and (2) handed over to, and accepted by, the priests.

In the early Church the situation was exactly parallel. The writers of Scripture were the apostles and their immediate associates. It was safeguarded by those men who, by the power of God's Spirit, could detect an inspired book and reject the many forgeries that came their way. A book was admitted to the New Testament canon as soon as it had been (1) written by the apostle, or his associate, and (2) handed over to, and accepted by, the "detectors".

The Bible's own explanation rings true. It makes sense. It describes a system that undoubtedly would have worked. There are no definite facts of history that conflict with it. And there is no alternative explanation that fits all the facts.

What more could you want of an explanation than that?

### **Verbal Inspiration and Verbal Changes**

Suppose that, for the moment at least, we accept the Bible's explanation of its Origin. God inspired it so that every word was as He wanted it to be. He overruled the men who collected the Biblical books together, so that all the inspired writings were included and the rest left out.

Then what? He left it to a great crowd of uninspired men to spoil everything, by copying it inaccurately and translating it inaccurately. We certainly don't have the inspired words now, so why should God have bothered to inspire the words in the first place? And if there was no point in His inspiring the original words, perhaps He never did anything of the kind...

Or so the argument runs.

Funnily enough, there is a rather similar problem to this in engineering. Let me try and explain it. It might help you to see the Biblical problem in a new light.

Have you ever wondered why it takes so many years to design and build a new type of aircraft? There are several reasons. One is that so many mathematical calculations must be done. A new aircraft means years of work for a whole team of mathematicians. The shape of every part of the wings must be just right, so that the aircraft will get as much "lift" from the air as possible. The exact thickness of each of thousands of metal parts must be worked out. These must be thick enough not to break when the aircraft hits a bumpy patch, but not too thick, or they will be so heavy that the aircraft will never take off.

Mathematics is called an exact science. A mathematician's answer to a question is always exactly right. Twice two is not "about four"; it is exactly four, 4.000000000, with as many zeros after the decimal point as you like to add.

But engineering is not an exact science. Cut yourself out a square of cardboard, 2 inches by 2 inches, and ask an obliging engineer to tell you its area. He will take it to a laboratory, make some very careful measurements, and then come back with an answer like this:

“Between 3.98 and 4.02 square inches.”

Why not four? Because you were not able to make the sides of your cardboard exactly two inches long, or its corners exactly square. Your engineer friend was not able to measure the cardboard exactly-only as accurately as his instruments would allow. And in any case, the size of the cardboard keeps changing a little with the weather.

Now back to our aircraft. The mathematician starts to work out the forces exerted by the air on the metal surfaces of the wings. But he does not concern himself with real air. Real air is frightfully complex stuff. It has dust particles in it. Sometimes there are raindrops, hailstones, snowflakes-and occasionally birds. The mathematician would go pale with fright if you asked him to calculate the exact result of flying through a flock of seagulls.

So our mathematician makes what are known as “simplifying assumptions”. He forgets about real air, and bases his calculations on “mathematician’s air”. Unlike real air, this is nice simple stuff, with clearly defined characteristics. The wings whose size and shape he calculates are not made of real metal, but of mathematician’s metal. His engines run on mathematician’s fuel. His imaginary plane carries no real people, just a bunch of mathematician’s passengers, all the same size and shape.

When he has finished his calculations he hands the results to an engineer, who is delighted to have them. The engineer is not worried about all the assumptions the mathematician has made. He knows that they cause errors in the final answers, but that those errors will be small-too small for him to bother about.

But it would bother him very much if anything were wrong with the mathematician’s mathematics. He is absolutely dependent on the mathematics itself being exactly right. If mathematics ceased to be an exact science the engineer could rely on nothing: the answers turned out by the mathematician could be so far wrong as to be utterly worthless, in that case.

So it is with the Bible. We can tolerate the few little uncertainties that have crept in through inaccurate copying and doubts about translation. But we could not tolerate the hopeless uncertainty of not knowing that behind our English Bible there was once an original that, like mathematics, was always “exactly right”.

Luke 24: 42 supplies an illustration. It describes how Jesus ate some food with His disciples, after He was raised from the dead. We don’t know exactly what He ate. Some manuscripts say He ate fish; some say fish and honeycomb.

It is a pity that we do not know for sure about the honeycomb. It would be interesting to know if He ate it or not. But it is not terribly important. *The vital fact is that He did eat something.* All the manuscripts agree on this. It is vital, because it shows that the disciples were not just “seeing things”. Before the resurrected Jesus appeared there was some fish; afterwards there was an empty plate.

But if you once deny that the words of the original were inspired, you open the floodgates to a

whole torrent of uncertainties: "Perhaps He never really ate anything-perhaps the disciples just made the whole thing up-perhaps Jesus never rose from the dead at all." And so you could go on, until the whole Bible had crumbled away in your shaky hands.

It is the same with the occasional problems of translation. They only introduce small uncertainties, that have no real effect on the Bible's teaching.

Take the important Greek word, *diatheke*; which occurs thirty-three times in our New Testament. Nobody can be sure how to translate it. Ordinary Greeks generally used it to mean a "testament" (a will). Greek-speaking Jews often used it to mean a "covenant" (a contract), especially when they spoke of God's covenant with his people in Old Testament times.

So in our New Testament, *diatheke* is sometimes translated "covenant", sometimes "testament". In some places the translators admit their doubts, and give us one word in the text and the other in a footnote.

We have lost something by not being able to translate this Greek word by an exact English equivalent. But we have not lost much. Both wills and contracts-testaments and covenants-are solemn legal documents. They are among the most solemn kinds of promise that men can make. The use of *diatheke* shows that God's promise of eternal life to us, and our promise to serve Him, is as firm, as unbreakable, as any promise could be.

But if we did not know that the words of the original were inspired, we could not be sure that God had used this strong word, *diatheke*. We should have no way of knowing that the promise of eternal life is as emphatic as words can make it.

Clearly, the uncertainties arising from faulty copying and doubtful translation matter a little. But only a little. We can be quite confident that our English Bible is not very different from the originals that God inspired. So we can be very thankful that those inspired originals contained the actual words that God intended.

Thankful, because this means that our English Bibles are an extremely good approximation to the Word of God itself.

## Interpretation

Is it really true that you can interpret the Bible to mean anything you like? And if so, is God to blame for having inspired a lot of ambiguous words?

There are two ways to look at this question.

There is a saying, based on a story in the Gospels, that the devil can quote Scripture to serve his own ends. This is perfectly true. But whose fault is that-the devil's, or Scripture's?

If some men want to play devil, and misuse Scripture to further their own ends, then let them. They have nothing to lose by it-except their hope of eternal life! But there is no reason for the rest of us to use their bad behaviour as a stick to beat the Bible with. We must put the blame where it belongs.

In the Middle Ages some men used Scripture to justify torturing what they called heretics, and burning them at the stake. As recently as the last century some men used Scripture to justify the slave trade. The arguments they used were quite absurd. It is hard to believe that any intelligent

person could be taken in by them. Yet millions of people were deceived by them at the time. Why?

Partly because they wanted to be, and partly because they did not know their Bibles. The case for slavery was based on the verses:

“Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren . . . God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem, and Canaan shall be their servant.”<sup>39</sup>

Now Canaan was the son of Ham. And Ham, said the wealthy slave traders, was the father of the black races while Japheth was the father of the white races. Therefore God intends the white races to enslave the black.

What rubbish! There is not a word in the Bible to suggest that all the black people are descended from Ham and the whites from Japheth. This is just a human fairy tale. In any case, the curse was not on Ham, but on his son, Canaan.

And the Bible tells us how the curse was fulfilled. The descendants of Canaan were the original inhabitants of the land of Israel, which was then called the land of Canaan. They were not black-skinned, or anywhere near it. After Israel had conquered them, “they put the Canaanites to forced labour.”<sup>40</sup>

Yet millions of well meaning people were taken in by the ridiculous arguments of the slave traders, and of those bishops who, to their shame, supported them. They were taken in because they did not know their Bibles. Scripture-quoting devils do not deceive people who are well acquainted with Scripture. That is why the devil who quoted Scripture at Jesus got nowhere.

Admittedly, the slavery issue is an extreme case. The problem of the hundred-and-one denominations of Christendom is more relevant today. How is it that Catholics, Anglicans, Baptists, Lutherans, and the rest can all take their different beliefs from the same Bible?

The answer is that, even here, human prejudice and ignorance of the Bible are the major factors. Have you ever met a man who could truthfully say, “I sat down with an open mind and studied the Bible; then I joined that church whose beliefs were nearest to the teaching of Scripture”?

No; and you are never likely to. The usual reasons for choosing a Christian denomination run like this:

“I was brought up in it.”

“When I got married I thought it would be better for the children if we both had the same faith, so I became a Catholic like my wife.”

“Well, the Presbyterian church was just round the corner, like, and there ain’t no point in walking further than you need, see what I mean.”

Even the clergy usually choose their churches before they are old enough to know the facts. The boy at a Catholic school goes to a Catholic college, and ends up as a priest. The Anglican schoolboy goes to a Protestant college, and ends up as an Anglican vicar. Can you blame the Bible because these two men preach different doctrines? In all probability, they decided which religion they were going to preach before they had even read the Bible through once. Having

made that decision, *then* they learnt how they could use the Bible to justify it.

Quite a large part of the Bible is perfectly straightforward, needing no more interpretation than any other non-fiction book. The first three Gospels are extremely easy to read and understand. They describe how Jesus worked many miracles, and told men how to live their lives. They tell how He was crucified, how He rose from the dead and ascended to heaven.

It may be difficult in the present intellectual climate to believe in Christ's miracles. It certainly is difficult to live as He said we should. But there is no problem about interpreting these Gospels. They interpret themselves.

So do the Acts of the Apostles, the historical books of the Old Testament, the Proverbs, and parts of the Law, the Psalms, the Prophets, and the New Testament Epistles.

From these parts of the Bible-much more than half of the total-any serious reader can easily learn the main outline of the Bible's teaching.

Some of the other parts of the Bible do need interpreting. Many of these gradually yield their secrets to the patient Bible reader. Some of them will baffle him to the end of his days.

But that is as it should be. If nothing in the Bible was difficult, men would call it "shallow". And they would be right. As it is, it forms a nicely balanced book. It contains milk for the simplest of God's children, and meat for the wisest of His servants to dig their teeth into.

## **Our English Bible**

So this Bible of ours is not at all the book it was alleged to be, by the hostile gentleman at the start of this chapter.

We have good reason to believe that its parts were written under the guidance of God's Spirit. It bears the marks of having been gathered together into one book by that Spirit, too. Ordinary human hands have copied and recopied it, but they were very careful hands. A vast amount of labour has gone into recreating something very close indeed to the original text.

Whole armies of scholars have studied how best to translate it into our mother tongue. The final result is a book that is close to God's original words; close enough to bring His light into the heart of all who read it.

Interpreting it is no great problem, if only-and this is a big "if"-we manage to read it with a humble, seeking mind. Much of it interprets itself for us. The rest of it is profound enough to hold our interest for a lifetime.

No, those are not serious problems. The big problems are these:

- (1) Deciding to read it diligently, and then sticking to that decision.
- (2) Believing the wonderful things it tells us.
- (3) Living up to the high standards it sets us.

Yes, these are real problems, aren't they?

But we can't blame God for them!

**Bible History - True or False?**

Give a dog a bad name, and you might as well hang him.

Because of this many Biblical scholars of fifty to 100 years ago have a lot to answer for. They gave the Bible a bad name-quite unjustly-and the Bible still has not lived down the reputation they gave it.

Most people are vaguely aware of the sort of mud they flung at the Bible in those days. Here is a typical example, dating back to 1909:

“The history of Abraham (Genesis 11:27 to 25:18) consists of a number of legendary narratives, which have been somewhat loosely strung together into a semblance of biographical continuity.”<sup>1</sup>

But far fewer people are aware of what leading scholars of today are saying. The late Prof. W. F. Albright, for instance. He was qualified as a theologian, historian, philosopher and orientalist. On top of that he was regarded until his death in 1971 as the greatest archaeologist in America, and one of the greatest in the world. This is his view of the Abraham story:

“A generation ago most critical scholars regarded this chapter [Genesis 14] as very late and quite unhistorical. Now we cannot accept such an easy way out of the difficulties which this chapter presents, since some of its allusions are exceedingly early, carrying us directly back into the Middle Bronze Age [2100 to 1600 B.C.]. For instance, the strange word for retainers’ (or, “trained servants”), used in verse 14, which occurs nowhere else in the Bible, is now known to be an Egyptian word employed in the Execration Texts of the late nineteenth century B.C. of the retainers of Palestinian chieftains, and used in the same sense four centuries later in one of the Taanach tablets. Several of the towns mentioned in this chapter are now proved to be very ancient”<sup>2</sup>

In another book he sums up the situation by saying:

“Our case for the substantial historicity of the tradition of the patriarchs [that is, of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob] is clinched.”<sup>3</sup>

Notice the scholarly caution in that last statement. The *substantial* historicity is proved. Archaeology will never be able to give *absolute* proof that the Bible is historically true. Over-enthusiastic statements by some Bible-believers, to the effect that archaeology has “proved the Bible true”, are well meaning but badly worded.

The real value of Biblical archaeology is not so much that it has shown the Bible to be true, but that it has shown many criticisms of the Bible to be false. There are countless examples of scholars declaring, “Well, anyway, that bit of the Bible is wrong,” only to find, a few years later, that they had to eat their words.

**Right After All**

The Bible mentions quite a number of famous men and great nations that are not mentioned in any other ancient book. For a long time there were two points of view about this. Some said: “History knows nothing of King Belshazzar, or King Sargon and his henchman, Tartan. History

knows nothing of the Hittite and Horite nations. Therefore the writers of the Bible must have been writing fiction, not history.”

Others said: “Not so fast. History isn’t complete yet. New facts may come to light one day that will show the Bible was right after all.”

Now we can see the wisdom of the second approach. All these names appear in the history books today.

Belshazzar is described by the Bible as the last king of Babylon, who was slain by the Persians when they captured the city.<sup>4</sup> But the ancient historians Berosus, Megasthenes, and Herodotus agreed that the last king of Babylon was called Nabonidus (or something like it). No historian ever mentioned Belshazzar. Something was wrong, somewhere.

In 1882 the explanation came to light. The archaeologist T. G. Pinches told the world of the discovery of what is called the Nabonidus Chronicle. This recorded on baked clay that Nabonidus had a son Bel-shar-usur (Belshazzar to his pals). Moreover, it made it clear that Nabonidus had a habit of saying to Belshazzar, “I’m off to the wars for a while, son. Just you run the kingdom till I get back.”

Nabonidus was unlucky. The clay tablets tell us that the last time he did this Belshazzar lost his kingdom for him to the Persians, just as the Book of Daniel said. The Persian conquerors arrested Nabonidus as soon as he returned home.

For thousands of years the world knew nothing of King Sargon II of Assyria, except for the meagre information in Isaiah 20:1. Was he a real person, or a mythical one? The scholars wondered-but only until Sargon’s capital city of Khorsabad was excavated. Then they were able to read Sargon’s own account of his war with Israel. This even explained who Sargon’s man “Tartan” was: this was not his name, but his rank. A modern Bible<sup>5</sup> calls him “commander in chief” instead of “Tartan”.

Long before 1000 B.C. there were two great nations in the Middle East, the Hittites and the Hurrians. Ordinary written history (apart from the Bible) does not go back that far. Until the birth of modern archaeology in the nineteenth century, people who rejected the Bible as a history book would have said that history knew nothing of such nations.

But nowadays we know a lot about these peoples from the records left behind in their ruined cities. We know that what the Bible said about the Hittites is broadly in line with what are now regarded as the historical facts. The Horites of the Old Testament were almost certainly the Hurrians under their Hebrew name, The Biblical Hivites may have been Hurrians too, although this is not yet firmly established.

### **Filling in the Background**

When I was at school in the 1930s, our French master in the Science Sixth Form insisted on teaching us French history. We protested against this, though in a very mild way; student demos had not been invented then, and the cane was still very much in use.

“Please, Sir, we are going to be scientists, not historians. We want to learn the French language. Why do we have to spend so much time on French history?”

“Because you will never be able to appreciate French literature unless you know something

about the historical background,” was his reply.

And he was right. Unless you know the setting of a book, you are reading in the dark.

This is why Bible readers owe such a debt to archaeology. Until the nineteenth century we knew practically nothing about the world in which the first half of the Old Testament is set, and not very much about the later periods.

But nowadays this is all changed. A modern Bible commentary will tell us the historical background of almost any chapter in the Old Testament, from Genesis 12 onwards. And almost invariably the chapters fit their background like hand in glove.

For example, take the use of animals in war. The earliest of these was the horse. It first appears in the Bible in the time of Joseph, which is shortly after it first appeared on the world scene. After this the Bible mentions horses more than 200 times.

Later there was a period when the elephant became the ancient equivalent of the tank. This period began when, according to critical scholars, Bible history was still being written. If they were right, you would expect to find the elephant mentioned in the Bible. But you don't. This fits in with the Bible's own statements about authorship, according to which the Bible was complete before the elephant appeared on the scene.

Countless little incidents take on a new meaning when we know the customs of the times. In the Tell-El-Amarna tablets (dated in the fifteenth century B.C.) a lesser king wrote to a greater king that he “bowed seven times”. This was his way of saying that he would offer no resistance. Evidently this was what Jacob meant when he “bowed himself to the ground seven times” as he approached Esau.<sup>6</sup>

It used to be a puzzle why a worshipper of God like Rachel should steal her father's idols.<sup>7</sup> We are now able to make a good guess as to her motives. Some tablets were found at Nuzi, not far from where she used to live, and written more or less in her time, that laid down rules for families. In certain circumstances the man who held the household idols would inherit the father's property. Greed, not idolatry, seems to have been Rachel's sin.

Even some of the miracle stories of the Old Testament fit in with the archaeological records. The Assyrian king, Sennacherib, left records of his invasion of Israel. They are inscribed upon what archaeologists call the Oriental Institute Prism and the Taylor Prism. He tells how his invincible army assaulted and captured forty-six of King Hezekiah's walled cities. Then he turned his attention to Hezekiah and his capital. “Himself, like a bird in a cage in the midst of Jerusalem, his royal city, I shut up,” wrote Sennacherib.

At that point the record of his triumphant progress ceases. Why did his mighty army fail to take the relatively small city of Jerusalem? He leaves us guessing. But the prophet Isaiah supplies a fitting explanation:

“Thus says the Lord concerning the king of Assyria . . . I will defend this city to save it... And the angel of the Lord went forth, and slew a hundred and eighty-five thousand in the camp of the Assyrians; and when men arose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies.”<sup>8</sup>

Since there are many readable books dealing with the impact of archaeology on our knowledge of the Old Testament,<sup>9</sup> there is no need to enlarge on this theme here. The simple fact is this: the more we learn about the world of the Old Testament, the more it appears to be an

accurate contemporary record, and not the mixture of myth and truth that it was once thought to be.

The eminent Jewish rabbi and archaeologist, Dr. Nelson Glueck, has spent many years of his life excavating in the land of Israel. This is how he views the impact of archaeology on the Old Testament:

“It may be stated categorically that *no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a Biblical reference*’. Scores of archaeological findings have been made which confirm in clear outline or in exact detail historical statements in the Bible. And, by the same token, proper evaluation of biblical descriptions has often led to amazing discoveries. They form tesserae in the vast mosaic of *the Bible’s almost incredibly correct historical memory*.<sup>10</sup> (The italics are mine.)

## The New Testament

The New Testament was never shot at quite so severely as the Old. Nevertheless it did come in for many sweeping accusations of being unhistorical. And its critics, like their Old Testament colleagues, have often had to eat their words.

When Paul was in Thessalonica, he was brought before “the rulers of the city” (Acts 17: 6-8). The Greek word used to describe these people is *politarch*. This word is not found anywhere else in the Bible, or in any classical Greek author.

The critics therefore used to assume that the author of the Acts had blundered, and had misspelt *poliarch*, which is a well-known Greek word for a commandant.

Then archaeologists set to work in and around Thessalonica. They dug up a number of inscribed tablets which referred to the *politarchs* of Thessalonica and several other cities nearby. Apparently this was the local name for city governors, and the Bible is the only ancient book in existence that has noted this fact.

At one time Luke 3: 1 was heavily criticised. It says that in the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar (Emperor of Rome), Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene.

“What a danger!” said certain scholars. “The fifteenth year of Tiberius was A.D. 27. But Lysanias was put to death years before that. And in any case, he wasn’t called a tetrarch (ruler). He was a king.”

You can imagine a mere schoolboy making the obvious suggestion -and the reception he would have got.

“Perhaps there might have been another Lysanias, Sir?”

“Don’t be ridiculous! You’re only guessing.”

Fortunately for the Bible’s good name a gentleman called Nymphaeus dedicated a pagan temple in Abila, the town that gave its name to the territory of Abilene. An inscription telling his story has been found there. This inscription includes a title, “The Lords Imperial”, that was only used of the Emperor Tiberius and his mother, Livia. Consequently we know that it was carved in the days of those two rulers, namely between A.D. 14 and 29. And Nymphaeus describes himself as “a freedman of Lysanias the tetrarch”.<sup>11</sup>

So now we know that there was, after all, a second Lysanias. He was a tetrarch in Abilene, just as Luke said, and he lived in exactly the right period for Luke’s date to be correct.

But, as with the Old Testament, archaeology's greatest service is in showing that the historical background of the New Testament is "right". As one scholar has put it:

"This background is a first-century background. The New Testament just will not fit into a second-century background."<sup>12</sup>

All men are children of their age. The writers of the New Testament were clearly children of the first century. Two examples are taken from the Gospel of John, one of the last New Testament books to be written.

John refers to the place where Jesus was tried as "the Pavement in the Hebrew, Gabbatha"<sup>13</sup>. Albright has shown that this was the Tower of Antonia, the headquarters of the Roman garrison. This was destroyed in the siege of A.D. 66-70 and was never rebuilt. Evidently the Gospel writer was a man who knew Jerusalem in the days of peace, before A.D. 66.

Again, John's Gospel was once criticised for its language. Many of its expressions were thought to have come from the Greek mystics who infiltrated Christianity in the second century. But many identical or similar phrases occur in the Dead Sea Scroll-which were written by Jews at, or near, the time of Jesus. This supports the Bible's assertion that the author of John's Gospel was a first-century Jew.

### **Some Unsolved Problems**

You would not expect archaeology to solve all the historical problems connected with the Bible. The list of unsolved problems is steadily getting smaller, but it still contains quite a number.

Although Daniel has long since been vindicated in his references to Belshazzar, his other classic "mistake" has not yet been cleared up. He refers to another king, Darius the Mede, and nobody yet knows who this is. Some scholars think that this is another name for a governor called Gobryas, or Gubaru.<sup>14</sup> Others think it was an alternative name for Cyrus, the Persian king.<sup>15</sup>

Nobody really knows. But in view of what has happened in the past it would take a brave man to say that Daniel definitely blundered. One more shovelful of earth, and the final answer to the problem may appear tomorrow.

We must always remember one thing when we criticise Jewish historians. Their methods were not the same as ours. This does not mean that we are right and they were wrong. It just means that they did things differently.

A good example of this is the way they recorded the lengths of the reigns of their kings. They did quite a number of things that no modern European historian would do. To give just one example, they sometimes had reigns that overlapped by several years, while one king was living in semi-retirement and his successor was ruling for him. Because of this the whole period of the kings of Israel used to give historians many a headache.

Much of the tangle has now been straightened out by Thiele,<sup>16</sup> who has discovered most of the principles on which the Jewish historians appear to have worked. Even so, some problems about dates still await solution.

Numbers in general present more unsolved problems than anything else. There are several reasons for this. For one thing, ancient methods of writing numbers were very clumsy (compare the “Roman” date for Napoleon’s retreat from Moscow-MDCCCXII-with our 1812). Hebrew and Greek numbers were difficult to copy accurately, and there appear to be more copyists’ errors in the numbers than in any other part of the text.

Then again, the ancients often used numbers in an approximate sense. We do this to a certain extent. Nobody would accuse you of inaccuracy if you said you had just had a fortnight’s holiday, when in fact you had been away for fifteen nights.

The Hebrews did this sort of thing to a greater extent. The widow who said she was gathering “two sticks” to make a fire<sup>17</sup> obviously meant “a few sticks”. For the purpose of local government the people were provided with “rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties and rulers of tens”. Obviously, in this context, “ten”, “fifty”, “hundred” and “thousand” were the names of administrative units, not exact numbers.

The ordinary Hebrew word for “thousand” is sometimes used to mean “family”, and is actually translated that way in Judges 6: 15.

The Hebrew word for “captain” is spelt the same as the word for “thousand”, although the pronunciation is different. Since a regiment in the Jewish army was also called a thousand, it is easy to see how this association of words would arise. Thus it is possible that some of the “thousands” who fought, or were slain in battle, were really captains.<sup>18</sup> If so, then the size of the army of Israel, and of its casualty lists, may possibly have been smaller than they appear in our English Bible.

While these uncertainties remain, we must be patient and wait for further information to emerge. On a very few occasions you may come across some other problem to which there is still no convincing answer.

If so, resist the temptation to say, “That can’t be true!” Remember that critics of the Bible historians have often had to beg their pardon a few years later. The chances are that, in a few years time, you will find that it could have been true, after all.

### **Men Who Have Changed Sides**

In any controversy you always find men changing sides, in both directions. Listing the men who have crossed over to one’s own side does not prove that one is right. I should not bother to mention any of them, were it not for one thing.

Those scholars who have swung in mid-career to a belief in the historical accuracy of the Bible have usually been archaeologists. In their case it has not been theoretical reasoning or the pressure of public opinion, that has moved them. It has been the evidence before their eyes.

One such man in the late nineteenth century was Sir William Ramsay. His early years established his reputation as a great and impartial scholar. He had been trained in the critical school of Biblical scholarship, and leaned that way.

His work in the Middle East as an archaeologist, specialising in New Testament times, changed him completely. In the later years of his life he was no longer the impartial scholar he had once been. He was a dedicated champion of the New Testament writers, because he had

become so convinced of their accuracy.

But even in the more detached period of his life, before he reached his full enthusiasm, he could write:

“Luke’s history is unsurpassed in respect of its trustworthiness ... Luke is a historian of the first rank... this author should be placed along with the very greatest of historians.”<sup>19</sup>

Luke’s accuracy as a historian is of especial importance because his two books-Luke’s Gospel, and the Acts of the Apostle-are full of eye-witness testimony to the resurrection of Jesus. Can you imagine Luke, the “historian of the first rank”, including these testimonies unless he had very good reason to accept their accuracy?

Ramsay’s researches appear to have played a part in the transformation of another great scholar of the age, Harnack. Towards the end of the nineteenth century he was in the front rank of those scholars who chose to attack the Bible. In the early years of the twentieth century he made an intensive study of the two books written by Luke, and ended up by defending Luke with the utmost vigour.<sup>20</sup>

A more recent case is that of Professor C. H. Gordon, who began his scholarly career as a higher critic. He has described how in about 1950 he made a study of the Gilgamesh Epic.<sup>21</sup> This is a series of tablets found in the ruins of Nineveh. They contain the legendary story of Gilgamesh, king of Uruk, and his companions. It probably dates back to about 2,000 B.C.

It contains the story of a flood, which reads very like a perverted version of the flood of Genesis. As Professor Gordon studied this part of the Epic, a thought came to his mind and would not leave. The flood story on these tablets was being told in the time of Abraham. It bore the marks of having been derived from the Genesis version, and not the other way round. Hence it must have come after the Genesis story.

Yet he had always assumed that Genesis was not compiled until a few hundred years before Christ-that is, more than a thousand years after the Gilgamesh flood story. This started him thinking for himself. Now he rejects what he formerly accepted without question. He regards the Critical view of Genesis as a dubious theory, based on inadequate evidence, and frequently in conflict with the facts of history and archaeology. Instead, he prefers to accept the Bible as true history, recorded at the time of the events it describes.

Another archaeologist, P. J. Wiseman, has reported a conversation in the course of a “dig” in Iraq. A man he describes as “one of the most brilliant modern archaeologists” said to him:

“I was brought up a ‘Higher Critic’, and consequently disbelieved in the actual truth of the early narratives of the Bible. Since then I have deciphered thousands of tablets, and the more I learn, the more I believe the Bible to be true.”<sup>22</sup>

## **True or False?**

The title of this chapter poses a question. Is Bible history true or false? It is not a simple question to answer. The facts are decidedly complex. Let me try to gather together the main threads.

In the first place, there has been a most noticeable change amongst ancient historians over the past century. In 1873 they tended to say, "If the Bible says it, then it's probably untrue." Nowadays they tend to say the opposite: "The Bible is a good history book. If the Bible says something, provided there is nothing miraculous about the story, it is probably true."

On the whole, Biblical archaeologists-the men who should know best-are the first scholars to defend the Bible. Some of them accept the Bible as the inspired Word of God, and are therefore biased in its favour. But even the others generally regard it as a very, very accurate book. The stories of miracles are probably the biggest stumbling blocks; these will be discussed in Chapter 21.

In the old days great numbers of supposed "historical errors" in the Bible used to be trotted out. Very many of these have now been shown to be errors by the critics, not by the Bible.

A few apparent errors remain unexplained. In other words, a number of interesting problems remain. As we saw in Chapter 12, this is exactly what we should expect. Every profound subject being studied today bristles with unresolved problems.

The very least that any informed person can say is this: the Bible has been proved to be in a class of its own as a history book. No other ancient book can begin to be compared with it for accuracy.

But the Bible-believing Christian will go further than this. He will say: "Because of the evidence that the Bible was inspired of God; because Jesus taught that 'the Scripture cannot be broken'-because of this I believe that Bible history is *completely* accurate. I believe that the relatively few problems that remain will one day be cleared up, just as so many earlier problems have been."

When he talks like this, the Christian is speaking by faith. But there is a very solid layer of fact underpinning his faith. There is nothing a historian can say to prove him wrong.

### ***Does the Bible Contradict Itself?***

There are some circumstances in life where, as the saying goes, you just can't win,

If all the books of the Bible told exactly the same story, if every detail fitted together perfectly, people would not be satisfied, They would say:

“This looks fishy. It's obviously a put-up job. The Bible writers have put their heads together, and cooked up a story that hangs together. I don't trust it.”

And they would be right. A situation like that would be highly suspicious.

But the Bible is not like that. There are places where it is difficult to make the details from one book fit in with another book. Sometimes one part of a book does not even seem to agree with another part of the same book.

Are the doubters reassured about this? Do they say, “This is more convincing. This looks more like real life”?

Not at all! They take the opportunity to criticise the Bible on different grounds. “It contradicts itself! So it can't possibly be wholly true.

Now this really is a poor argument. Real life is full of situations that appear contradictory. Only when you learn all the circumstances do you realise that these real life “contradictions” are not contradictory at all.

Take this one for example. On October 31st 1967 a London newspaper, the *Daily Telegraph*, reported that Mrs Margaret Fennel had twin sons in Birmingham Maternity Hospital the previous day. They were born in the small hours of the morning. The first was born at 1.40 a.m., and the second at 1.10 a.m.

Yes, you read it correctly. The first was born at 1.40 and the second at 1.10!

The explanation is that Daylight Saving ended that morning. At 2.00 a.m., when Number One was twenty minutes old, the clocks were put back to 1.00 a.m. Ten minutes later Number Two arrived at 1.10 a.m. Simple, when you know the whole story, isn't it?

Then again, who would have thought that in the year 1970 a very respectable scientific journal would make statements like this:

“Devils do not occur in cleared places . . . Devils live successfully in close contact with human settlement and activity . . . Man is the principal predator of adult devils.”

But it did. The journal was the Australian journal of Zoology. It was talking about an animal little known to Europeans, called the Tasmanian devil.

Another example. American and British motorists have often argued about the fuel consumption of cars. “All I can say is, Elmer, that if you can only get fifteen miles to the gallon out of that Ford, there must be something wrong.”

Then another voice breaks in. “Hey, you guys, don't you know that a gallon ain't a gallon on the other side of the Atlantic?”

It isn't, either. The British gallon is a quarter as large again as an American gallon. But that is

not as bad as the confusion over the word "billion". It takes a thousand American billions to make just one British billion.

Pity the poor foreigner who hears us talking about Eton College, and The London School of Economics. How is he to know that Eton College is not a college but a school, and The London School of Economics is not a school but a college?

People have to have facts like this about the modern world pointed out to them, to explain "contradictions" they meet in life today. It is not surprising that we sometimes come across a so-called contradiction in the Bible, and have to hunt for facts about the ancient world to explain what lies behind it.

### **Differences Between the Gospels**

The Gospels are a happy hunting ground for people who like to point out "contradictions in the Bible. This is because there are four of them, all covering much the same ground. We should expect to find differences between them, and we do.

A favourite criticism is that gospel writers cannot even agree on the wording of a little notice board. Pontius Pilate nailed this board to Christ's cross, so that passers-by might know who was hanging there. This is what the gospels say was written on the board:

*Matthew:* THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS<sup>1</sup>

*Mark:* THE KING OF THE JEWS<sup>2</sup>

*Luke:* THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS<sup>3</sup>

*John:* JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS<sup>4</sup>

It is not difficult to find the missing fact that explains these differences. John says that the notice was written in three languages: Hebrew, Greek and Latin.<sup>5</sup>

There is nothing to suggest that the wording was the same in all three languages. One writer is presumably giving us an exact copy of the Greek inscription, while the others are giving us translations of the Hebrew inscription, or the Latin one, or even, perhaps, a mixture of them both.

At the other end of Christ's life, the critics point to the differences between the two stories of the birth of Jesus. After the shepherds and the Wise Men had visited the new baby his parents departed from Bethlehem with Him.

Where did they take Him? Matthew says they went to Egypt and stayed there until the death of King Herod. Luke says they went to Jerusalem for a short visit and then went home to Nazareth, which is in the opposite direction from Egypt.

The critics are, as usual, on very shaky ground. The early disciples were not exactly feeble-minded men. They must have been well aware of this difference between Matthew and Luke. The difference did not worry them, however, because they evidently knew the explanation.

With a little effort we can easily rediscover that explanation for ourselves. To the careful reader it is obvious that *Matthew and Luke are describing two different episodes* in the story of Jesus. Luke says that the shepherds visited Him in the stable where He was born,<sup>6</sup> on the very day that He was born,<sup>7</sup> and he calls Him “a babe”.<sup>8</sup>

Matthew, on the other hand, tells us how the Wise Men had to make a long journey. By the time they arrived, Jesus was no longer a “babe”, but was a “young child”.<sup>9</sup>

This is why Herod thought it necessary to slay all the Bethlehem children up to the age of two.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, by this time they were no longer lodging in a stable, but were living in a house<sup>11</sup>-a point that is regularly overlooked by Christmas card artists and producers of nativity plays.

When these facts are noted, there is no contradiction at all. Luke tells us that, when Jesus was a few weeks old, His parents took Him via Jerusalem to Nazareth. From Matthew we can deduce that, some time later, they were back in Bethlehem.

We can only guess why they went back to Bethlehem to live. Perhaps Mary thought it right that the Son of God should be brought up in the place appointed by God as His birthplace.

Whatever the reason, they went back, and were found there by the Wise Men. Then, as Matthew tells us, they went to Egypt for a time, and eventually went back to Nazareth again.

### **The Way We Say Things**

An English university student came late into the college dining room.

“Any dinner left?”

There wasn't. His friends were not the least bit sympathetic. “You've had it!” they chorused.

A Chinese student looked puzzled, and turned to his English neighbour. “I do not understand. Why do they say that he has had it? He has not had it, and it seems that he is not going to get it!”

The English student smiled. “That's an idiom-the way we say things. You'll get used to it in time.”

Foreigners always have trouble with our idiom-the way we put things. We realise that, and smile at them. But where the Bible is concerned we often forget one thing.

The Bible was written by Hebrews, not by Europeans. The idiom of the Old Testament is Hebrew idiom, not English. Even the Greek New Testament contains a great deal of Hebrew idiom. Where the Bible is concerned we are the foreigners.

Consequently we need to make an effort to appreciate the Hebrew idiom that shows through into our English Bible. Unless we do, we shall sometimes be as baffled as the Chinese student when he first heard the saying, “You've had it.”

Hosea reports God as declaring, “I desired mercy, and not sacrifice.”<sup>12</sup> Jesus quotes the saying with approval.<sup>13</sup> If we read this as if an Englishman had written it, we shall frown.

“If God doesn't want sacrifice, why did He command the children of Israel to offer sacrifices? And, above all, why did He allow His Son to be sacrificed on the cross?”

But it was written by a Hebrew, not an Englishman, and we must read it in the light of the

Hebrew idiom he used. This idiom is explained for us in the book of Deuteronomy. Forty years after God made His covenant with one generation of Israelites, Moses spoke to their sons and grandsons: "The Lord made not this covenant with our fathers but with us, even us, who are all here alive this day."<sup>14</sup>

But God *did* make that covenant with their fathers. Moses obviously meant: "God did not *only* make that covenant with our fathers, but *also* with us."

In exactly the same way, "I desired mercy and not sacrifice", meant, to a Hebrew, "I not *only* desired sacrifice, but *also* mercy." You will find other examples of this idiom in the English Bible if you look out for them. Appreciation of this idiom alone will clear up a number of apparent contradictions in the Bible.

Quite a number of the supposed contradictions in the Bible arise through not appreciating (or not trying to appreciate) the subtleties of the language used. I have room for only one more example. Compare these two passages:

"And when *Saul inquired of the Lord*, the Lord answered him not."<sup>15</sup>

"So Saul died for his transgression . . . and also for asking counsel of one that had a familiar spirit, to inquire of it, and *inquired not of the Lord*."<sup>16</sup>

Although two different Hebrew words for "inquired" are used in these passages, this does not explain the difficulty. They are both rendered fairly in the English translation. It is only when we reconstruct the whole incident that we can see what happened. To do this we need to read both chapters right through.

Saul was a very impatient man. He always wanted quick results. This twist in his character had led him into conflict with God before.<sup>17</sup>

On this occasion he was desperate for a quick answer. He sought one from God, but God kept him waiting. So he turned away from God, and put his questions to a witch instead. This led to his undoing.

In the light of this story it is obvious what the words, "Saul . . . inquired not of the Lord", would have conveyed to a Hebrew reader. Saul made a quick show of inquiring of God, but did not keep it up long enough to do any good.

An English poet has expressed the same sort of contrast:

"I often say my prayers;  
But do I ever pray?"

We do not accuse the poet of contradicting himself. Why should we accuse the writers of the Biblical passages quoted above?

### **The New Testament quotes the Old**

"How can we trust the New Testament writers? Why, they can't even quote the Old Testament

correctly.”

This is a frequent criticism. But, like so many other criticisms of the Bible, it is a very shallow one. The facts go right against it.

It is true, of course, that in many places the New Testament quotes the Old Testament in a way that you or I would not do. But what of that? We are not ancient Jewish writers. We have our own literary standards, and they had theirs. And the two are not the same.

They could not be the same, because our literary tools are so much better than theirs. One great advantage is that we are able to make a clear distinction between what is known as “direct quotation” and “indirect quotation”. Thus:

(1) *Direct quotation*: Dr. Blank wrote, “The Bible is a very fine book.”

(2) *Indirect quotation*: Dr. Blank has said that the Bible is excellent.

In the first example, inverted commas are used to indicate that I am quoting the exact words of Dr. Blank. In the second, no inverted commas are used; this indicates that my words convey Dr. Blank’s message without using his actual words.

Punctuation was not invented in Bible times, so the Bible writers could not do this. They were also unable to use several other useful modern devices. Sometimes, to shorten a long quotation, I have missed out a bit in the middle. This might occasionally confuse the reader were it not for one thing: nowadays a row of dots signifies that this has been done. But we are left to guess when an ancient writer has done this.

Sometimes I have slipped a comment of my own, or an explanation of a difficult word, into the middle of a quotation from another author. You can tell these additions of mine because they are enclosed in square brackets, like this, [ ] or, inside Biblical quotations, in ordinary brackets, like this, ( ). But it is often very difficult to tell where an ancient author has done this sort of thing, before brackets were invented.

We saw in Chapter 17 how tremendously careful the Jews were to copy their Scriptures accurately. No devout Jew would dream of quoting Scripture carelessly. All the New Testament writers except Luke were Jews. We may not fully understand why they sometimes varied the words of the Old Testament when they quoted it. But of this we can be sure: they must have done it deliberately, for some good reason.

In many cases we can clearly see their motive. They wished to interpret the Scripture for us while they were quoting it. To give a simple example, there is a passage in Isaiah which says:

“I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation; he that believeth shall not make haste.”<sup>18</sup>

The apostle Peter quotes this verse, and tells us that the “stone” referred to is Jesus Christ—the foundation stone of God’s purpose. While he quotes the first part of the verse without altering the sense, because it is simple to understand, he alters the last words materially. He changes, “he that believeth shall not make haste”, to, “he that believeth on Him shall not be put to shame.”<sup>19</sup>

He adds the words “on Him” to make it plain that Isaiah means belief *in Christ*. And he changes, “shall not make haste”, to, “shall not be put to shame”. This lets us know that the “making haste” meant by Isaiah is the terrified, but pointless, running away of a sinner who

cannot escape judgement.

We, with our modern literary customs, would not quote the Bible like that. We should give an exact quotation, and then follow with an exposition. But Peter went by the accepted rules of the times, and combined quotation and exposition in one. His method has a great advantage over ours: it uses far less words.

Because of their economy in words, the apostles sometimes appear to apply the Old Testament to the wrong thing. In fact they do nothing of the kind. They merely leave it to us to expand their arguments, and draw out the full meaning. Paul did this in the verse:

“Their sound went into all the earth,  
And their words unto the ends of the world.”<sup>20</sup>

Paul uses this to prove that the gospel is to be preached to all nations. But the quotation comes from a psalm which begins:

“The heavens declare the glory of God,  
And the firmament showeth His handywork.”<sup>21</sup>

It is these silent witnesses in the sky whose message goes out to all the earth, in the fourth verse of this psalm. Yet Paul applies it to the preachers of the first-century Church!

Is it possible that Paul has blundered? Most unlikely. Paul is far too good a Bible student to slip up like that. He has a reason for what he does.

If we read the whole of the psalm, we begin to see that reason. The first half of the psalm is all about the glory of God revealed in nature. Then there is an abrupt change of thought. The rest of the psalm is all about the glory of God revealed in the Word of God.

If Paul were a modern writer he would probably have explained his quotation like this:

“The two halves of the psalm are connected. The first half is a parable; the second half is its explanation. The light of the sun in the first half represents the light of God’s Word in the second half. Consequently the words spoken about the sun in this psalm apply equally well to the Word of God. And that’s the way I have applied them.”

Another kind of problem occurs in the opening of Mark’s Gospel. He says, “As it is written in Isaiah the prophet”<sup>22</sup> and then makes a double quotation. First he quotes from Malachi, and only after that does he keep his promise and quote Isaiah. Why this peculiar behaviour?

Simply because he was a first-century Jew, not a twentieth-century European. A modern English writer would have introduced this double quotation with some such phrase as this:

“You know what Isaiah (and a later prophet, Malachi, who reflected Isaiah’s words) said: . . .

But Mark’s very much simpler introduction was quite sufficient for the readers of his day. They were used to that sort of quotation. And they were very much more familiar with the Old Testament than we are, so they needed less explanation, anyway.

Thus, although there are problems involved in the way the New Testament quotes the Old, they are not serious. They nearly all yield to patient investigation along the lines I have illustrated.

## A Lot Depends on the Point of View

About 150 years ago two famous Englishmen spoke like this:

*Wordsworth:* "Earth has not anything to show more fair."

*Cobbett:* "The great wen." (A wen is a festering sore.)

Believe it or not, each was describing London. And they were not contradicting each other. They just happened to be looking at it from different points of view.

Wordsworth had been standing on Westminster Bridge admiring the magnificent skyline of great buildings. Cobbett was a country dweller, thinking, probably, of the filth and squalor of the London slums. Each from his own viewpoint was speaking the truth.

Is it surprising that Bible writers who set out to portray things from different points of view describe them differently? This is not contradiction. This is just the giving of extra information.

The four Gospels are written from four entirely different points of view.<sup>23</sup> Matthew wrote for Jews. His aim was to portray Jesus as King of the Jews. He says that Christ's preaching was all about the "Kingdom of Heaven". He puts this phrase into the mouth of Jesus dozens of times, and only calls it the "Kingdom of God" on two or three occasions.

Mark wrote for Romans. He portrayed Jesus as the servant of mankind. To him, as to Luke and John, the Kingdom is the "Kingdom of God", not of "Heaven".

Luke was a Greek, writing for Greeks. He interpreted for his readers the Hebrew phrases that they would not understand. Matthew says the Jewish children cried, "*Hosanna!*"<sup>24</sup> No doubt they did. That was a Hebrew word they would know. It means, "Please save us." But Luke puts another word into their mouths: "glory". From the Greek point of view, that was what *hosanna* amounted to.

Matthew reported Jesus as telling the Jews, "When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place . . . flee into the mountains."<sup>25</sup>

The Greeks would have wondered what that was all about. So Luke puts an interpretation into Christ's mouth: "When ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies. . . flee to the mountains."<sup>26</sup> From a Greek point of view that was exactly what Jesus did say.

The Gospel of John is very different from the other three Gospels—so different that scholars have coined a special name for the "problem" this creates.<sup>27</sup> But there is no contradiction involved. John is looking from a very different viewpoint. He reveals Jesus as the only-begotten Son of God. He is concerned more with the inner meanings of events than the events themselves.

Not all the apparent contradictions in the Bible are just a question of the writer's point of view. But many of them are.

## New Facts Solve Problems

Again and again a Bible problem is solved when we come across some new fact. This need not be an archaeological fact. It can be a fact from another part of the Bible that explains an apparent

contradiction. Compare these two verses, both taken from chapters in which Moses described how Israel would be punished for her sins:

“I will not cast them away, neither will I abhor them, to destroy them utterly.”<sup>28</sup>

“The Lord shall send upon thee cursing... until thou be destroyed.”<sup>29</sup>

What are we to make of this? Was Israel to be destroyed or not?

The answer is: “Yes and no.” That answer is supplied for us by the prophet Amos:

“Behold, the eyes of the Lord God are upon the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from off the face of the earth; saving that I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob, saith the Lord.”<sup>30</sup>

The precision of this language is uncanny. God would destroy the *kingdom* of Israel. But he would not destroy the “house of Jacob”—a Hebrew expression meaning the *race* of Israel.

This resolves the apparent contradiction between the “destroy” and “not destroy” promises. But it does more than that. It gives us another remarkable example of fulfilled prophecy. Just as Amos prophesied, the kingdom was destroyed, but—against all the probabilities—the race of Israel has been preserved.

Even little facts about the Hebrew language can resolve some problems for us. This one, for example. ~ Samuel 8: 13 says that David’s army smote 18,000 men of *Syria* in the Valley of Salt. But I Chronicles 18:12 says they smote 18,000 men of *Edom* in the Valley of Salt.

The Hebrew words for Syria and Edom differ by only one letter. One has the letter *daleth* where the other has the letter *resh*. Now *daLeth* and *resh* are the two most similar letters in the Hebrew alphabet. Both look rather like an upside-down L, but one has a square corner and the other a slightly rounded corner.

The slight roundness of that corner is the only thing to distinguish the Hebrew words for Syria and Edom. Obviously we have here one of those very rare copyists’ errors.

Yes, new facts keep solving old problems for us. There are still a few apparent contradictions in the Bible that cannot yet be convincingly explained. But we have lots of new facts to learn yet.

Can we reasonably doubt that, if only we had all the facts, we might be able to solve all the problems?

### ***The Nasty Objections***

In Russia today the Bible is strictly banned. The real reason for this is obvious. The Communists would like to see the Christian faith gradually disappear. So they suppress the Book that feeds it.

But they like to sound more liberal than they are. So officially they give another reason for the ban: "The Bible is pornography."

Pornography? If it were not such a serious matter, it would be laughable. The Bible pornography! What a joke. If this is so, why (don't the dirty bookshops sell it? Why don't foul-minded people flock to read it? And why do so many decent people read it with delight, instead of putting it down in disgust?

This ridiculous accusation shows how far some people will go in their attacks on the Bible. In the West we have not yet reached quite such depths of absurdity. But there is a common tendency to suggest that the Bible is not really a "nice" book.

In this chapter we must examine some of the most usual accusations of this kind. This is not going to make very pleasant reading. It is so much easier to throw mud than to clean it up.

But it is a job that must be done. Many people have a vague idea that the Bible is cruel, bloodthirsty and indecent in places. We need to look at the facts, and see just how much truth there is in this idea.

To begin with here is a rather extreme example. A horrid little pamphlet called *The Faults and Failings of Jesus Christ* was published in London some years ago. In the whole pamphlet there was not one criticism of Jesus that would stand examination.

The author attacked Jesus savagely over the incident of the barren fig tree.<sup>1</sup> The Gospel describes how Jesus was hungry and went to a fig tree, looking for fruit. He found none, and promptly cursed the fig tree, which then withered away.

"There!" cries the cynic. "The action of a stupid, petulant, spoilt boy!"

Unfortunately he has missed the whole point of the story. The account of His forty days fasting in the wilderness<sup>2</sup> shows that Jesus *was not a man to be bothered about food. What He did to the fig tree* was done for an excellent reason: to teach the Jews a vital lesson.

To them the fig tree had always been symbol of the Jewish nation.<sup>3</sup> Earlier in His ministry Jesus took up this figure of speech, and built a parable around it.<sup>4</sup>

"Israel is like a barren fig tree," Jesus had explained. "The Good Gardener is going to manure it and nurse it for one more year, to see if He can at last coax some fruit out of it. If that last effort fails, the tree must be cut down."

Now that year had gone by. Jesus had made His last great effort to convert the Jews, but without success. Already they were arranging to crucify Him.

So Jesus delivered His second parable about the fig tree, to tell the Jewish nation it had thrown away its last chance. But this time, to give His message more power, He acted the parable

before their eyes.

## Marriage in the Bible

The things people say about the Bible's teaching on marriage are enough to make your hair stand on end.

"In the Old Testament God encouraged his favourites to have as many wives as they liked. Solomon had a whole harem full-hundreds of them. Then in the New Testament the pendulum swung the other way. Jesus and Paul said people had better not get married at all."

That is the accusation. Now what are the facts?

Fact Number One is that God never "encouraged" anybody to have more than one wife. In the very beginning of the Old Testament the ideal of marriage is clearly set out: *one* man and *one* woman, joined together as *one*.<sup>5</sup> Jesus confirmed this age-old principle, and pointed out that God had always intended the marriage union to be lifelong.<sup>6</sup>

Later in the Old Testament God relaxed the rules a little. This was not because He had abandoned the ideal, but because men were showing themselves unable to keep to it. As Jesus explained, what God did was to make a temporary concession to human weakness.<sup>7</sup>

The kings of Israel were expressly forbidden to take many wives.<sup>8</sup> Solomon disobeyed God in building up his great collection of women, and we are told that this led to his downfall.<sup>9</sup> There are two great love stories in the historical books of the Old Testament: the story of Isaac and Rebekah<sup>10</sup> and the story of Boaz and Ruth.<sup>11</sup> In both these stories there is no suggestion that any other wife was involved.

So it is quite untrue to say that the Old Testament encouraged polygamy. It permitted it, that is all. What it encouraged was monogamy, the union of one man with one wife. It is equally untrue to say that Jesus discouraged marriage. What He discouraged was adultery<sup>12</sup> and divorce.<sup>13</sup> He recognised that only exceptional people could do as He had done, and forego marriage in order to serve God more freely.<sup>14</sup>

As for Paul, no man in history has ever been misrepresented worse than he. People ignorant of his writings sometimes call him a woman hater. Yet he wrote:

"I commend unto you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church that is at Cenchrea, that ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you. For she hath been a succourer of many, and of mine own self."<sup>15</sup>

This is no isolated instance. Throughout Paul's epistles we can see his affection for all his Christian associates, both men and women alike.

Paul's teaching about the physical side of marriage is the most frank advice on this topic in the whole Bible.<sup>16</sup> (You will need to read it in a modern translation to get its message. Older translations rather prudishly obscure its meaning.) Paul's words in this passage are so helpful to married couples that they are quoted in a booklet distributed by the marriage guidance council in one Commonwealth country.

It is very clear from this that Paul was in no way against marriage. He personally found it useful in his preaching work to be unmarried, and hence free from family responsibilities. So he suggested that some-not all, but some-other Christians might benefit from being single, too.<sup>17</sup> He also advised postponement of marriage on one occasion in what he called "the present distress"<sup>18</sup>-persecution, probably. Who could reasonably quarrel with that?

Another man who is unjustly criticised concerning marriage is Ezra. When he discovered that many Jewish men had married idolatrous wives, he made them divorce them.<sup>19</sup> This seems very harsh to many people.

It puzzled me a little, too, until one of my first trips to Africa. I had to attend an Elders' Meeting of a newly established church. One item discussed was the position of a man who wished to join the church. Like a great many Africans this man had two wives and two sets of children.

There was only one other European present. We both thought that perhaps the man should be told, "If you had only one wife when you were converted, you would not be allowed to take a second. But what is done cannot be undone. As a concession, you may join the church and keep your two wives, but you must not marry a third."

But every one of the African elders was up in arms against us. "That would never do! We know our own people better than you do. To make that concession would open the door to all sorts of immorality. We want to maintain high moral standards, and consequently a polygamist must be compelled to put away his second wife before he can be baptized."

At the time this seemed ruthless. But now I know Africa better, and I realise that those African elders were right, and I was wrong. They were acting in accordance with the highest principles of Christian love. My own views had been based on ill-informed sentimentality.

If we knew all the circumstances surrounding Ezra, we should no doubt agree that he also was right. He was fighting against idolatry, fighting for the very survival of the true worship of God. Doubtless his action, though stern, was necessary.

### **Bloodthirstiness in the Old Testament**

Half a century ago a Cambridge University professor of English literature gave three lectures entitled, "On Reading the Bible".<sup>20</sup> A better name for them might have been, "How Not to Read the Bible".

The professor insisted that "the bloodthirsty jealous Jehovah of the Book of Joshua" is not the Christian God. He was certainly expressing a popular sentiment. But was he doing justice to the Old Testament?

The God that Jesus preached was the God of the Old Testament. Jesus did not criticise Him, or regard Him as bloodthirsty. What are the facts of the case?

The first fact is that the God of *both* Testaments has two sides to His character. He is loving and merciful to those who try to serve Him; He is stern and just towards those who persist in wickedness.

Here are a number of verses describing God. Those on the left come from the Old Testament, those on the right from the New.

*The God of the Old Testament*

“The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.”<sup>21</sup>

“Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself; I am the Lord.”<sup>23</sup>

“The men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly . . . the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven.”<sup>25</sup>

*The God of the New Testament*

“God is love . . . He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”<sup>22</sup>

“This commandment we have from Him, that he who loveth God love his brother also.”<sup>24</sup>

(Jesus said) “So shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire.”<sup>26</sup>

These verses are not exceptional, they are reasonably typical. The character of the God revealed in both Testaments is exactly the same.

There is, however, one important difference between the two Testaments.

In the Old Testament, God's judgments upon the wicked were meted out upon the spot. Sometimes they took the form of what appeared to be a natural disaster (as at Sodom), or a plague. Sometimes the instrument of God's judgments was the sword.

In the New Testament it was exceptional for God to judge wicked men at the time.<sup>27</sup> The general principle was that judgment would be reserved until the great Day of Judgment.<sup>28</sup> But when it fell, it would be just as severe as anything that happened to the wicked in Old Testament times.

Thus Joshua had to execute God's judgments on the wicked nations of Canaan in the past; Jesus will have to do it to the wicked of this world in the future. The principle-that the wicked must be destroyed-is the same in both Testaments. The only differences are (1) in the timing, and (2) in the methods used.

Why should God use the sword as an instrument of His judgments in the Old Testament? It would be interesting to know His reason. But He has not chosen to tell us what it is.

Even so, the Old Testament has revealed one important fact: that the sword of judgment was only a necessary evil, and only a temporary one at that. Although he was essentially a very good man King David was not allowed to build God's Temple, because he had been a man of war and had shed blood.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, many of the prophets looked forward to the day when God would change the hearts of men, and so bring permanent peace to the whole earth.<sup>30</sup>

This leads to another problem. David, the man of war, wrote some rather bloodthirsty psalms where he cursed his enemies. Can we regard those as inspired by God?

Yes, we have no alternative. Some of them are quoted in the New Testament as inspired prophecies of God's judgment on Judas, the traitor who betrayed Christ.

But this does not mean that God approved of the anger in David's heart when he wrote those

curses. As we saw in Chapter 14, the writer's own style and character still shows through, even when he is writing under inspiration. God could even use a murderer like Caiaphas to utter inspired prophecy.<sup>31</sup> But this did not justify Caiaphas' wickedness. And neither did the inspiration of David's prophetic curses justify the aggressive spirit of this "man of war".

### **Was Jehovah Merely a Tribal God?**

In the ancient world every nation liked to have its own national god. There seems to be a relic of this ancient custom in the present-day superstition of having patron saints: St. George of Merrie England, St. Andrew of Scotland, St. David of Wales, and St. Patrick of Ireland.

Among Israel's neighbours the Philistines regarded Dagon as their pet god, the Canaanites had Baal, and the Moabites had Chemosh. To this list some people would like to make one addition: the Israelites had Jehovah (or *Yahweh*, as the name was originally pronounced).

Was this really how the children of Israel regarded the Lord? Was He just one god among many? Or did they regard Jehovah as Jesus did-as the one and only true God?

From beginning to end the Old Testament supplies the answer. Jehovah was not just the tribal god of Israel. He was the one Supreme Being, the Creator of heaven and earth.

The only period in Old Testament history where there is no mention of idols at all is the very early period, as described in the beginning of Genesis. The one God created the world. The one God punished man when he sinned. The one God brought the flood. Even the wicked men of those days were not accused of idolatry. It almost seems as if idols had not yet been invented.

When idolatry did appear, the whole Bible condemned it. The Law of Moses, the Psalms, the Prophets-wherever you look you find condemnations of idolatry. Isaiah's statement, "I am the Lord and there is none else"<sup>32</sup> sums up the teaching of them all. Plenty of Israelites descended to idolatry. But they were always condemned for it.

Occasionally we meet a verse that creates a slight problem. When Israel's ruler, Jephthah, was about to fight with the king of Ammon he said:

"Wilt not thou possess that which Chemosh thy god giveth thee to possess? So whomsoever the Lord our God shall drive out from before us, them will we possess."<sup>33</sup>

To an English reader it does almost seem as if Jephthah believed in Chemosh. It is as if he is saying, "Chemosh will fight for you, and Jehovah for us-and may the best side win."

Once more, we need to remember that the Bible was not written by modern Englishmen. If it had been, Jephthah might have been reported as starting his speech like this:

"Now let us, for the sake of argument, suppose that your god, Chemosh, really exists . . .

But the Israelites did not bother with such niceties of expression. They could speak of stones listening,<sup>34</sup> trees talking<sup>35</sup> and corpses carrying on a conversation.<sup>36</sup> As Hebrews they understood one another, and we shall understand them, too, provided that we don't take their vivid figures of speech too literally.

### **Pharaoh and Judas**

According to some people, Pharaoh, King of Egypt, and Judas Iscariot, the betrayer of Jesus, have one thing in common: God punished them both for something they could not help.

They complain that God hardened Pharaoh's heart, and then brought a succession of plagues upon him for being hard-hearted. God decided in advance that Judas would betray Jesus, and then led him to a horrible death as a punishment-with a promise of worse to come on the Judgment Day. All of which, says the objector, was very unfair of God.

Very well. What really did happen?

Taking Pharaoh first, it certainly is true that God was said to harden his heart. Paul says:

“For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, ‘For this very purpose did I raise thee up, that I might show in thee My power, and that My name might be published abroad in all the earth. So then He hath mercy on whom He will, and whom He will He hardeneth.’”<sup>37</sup>

Was it fair to harden a man's heart like this? If Pharaoh had started off as a good man, then it certainly would have been very unfair. But this was not so. God never makes a good man behave badly. *Pharaoh started off as a bad lot*. He was already oppressing Israel cruelly before God said anything about hardening his heart.<sup>38</sup>

Also, we have here another example of Hebrew idiom. God sometimes says, “I will do such-and-such”, when He really means, I have foreseen that such-and-such will happen, and I shall permit it to happen”.

You can see that this is so from Isaiah chapter 29. In verse 3, God says to Jerusalem. “I will camp against thee round about, and will lay siege against thee.”

But of course God Himself did not camp around Jerusalem and besiege it. The Assyrian army did. And the Assyrians were acting under their own free will. (Isaiah 10: 5-7' proves that.) So when God said, “I will camp...”, He obviously meant, “I will allow the enemy army to camp...”

There is a second example of this idiom in Isaiah 29. Verse 10 says, “*The Lord* hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep and (He) *hath closed your eyes.*”

Verse 13 explains what this really means. God did not blind the eyes of people who were trying to see. He never does. The literal truth, as expressed in verse 13 was this:

“This people draw near Me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour Me, but (they) *have removed their heart far from Me.*”

If they “removed their heart far from God”, this means that they wilfully shut their own eyes. God realised that they had done so. That is obviously what He meant when He said that He had closed their eyes.

In the same way, when a Hebrew read the words, “I will harden Pharaoh's heart”, he would take it as a prophecy that the wicked Pharaoh would harden his own heart.

This is exactly what did happen. In the Exodus story it says fifteen times that Pharaoh's heart was hardened. Three times it says Pharaoh hardened his own heart. Seven times it says God did

the hardening. Five times it states that Pharaoh's heart grew harder, without saying who hardened it.

Clearly, God did not make a good man bad. He merely took hold of a very bad man, and made use of his badness.

This is equally true of Judas Iscariot. Jesus did not want him to turn out badly. He wanted him to be a successful apostle, like the other eleven.<sup>39</sup> But of his own free will, Judas chose to go the wrong way.

I have twice used the expression, "free will". The Bible tells us, in many different ways, that God has given us freedom to choose between good and evil.<sup>40</sup> "Free will" is a useful expression to describe our freedom of choice.

God foresaw how Judas would use his free will. God even caused prophecies about Judas to be included in the Old Testament. This raises another question: if God foresaw, and foretold, how Judas would act, did Judas really have any freedom of choice?

People have argued about this as long as anyone can remember. The final answer is inescapable: yes, Judas must have had free will, because the Bible says we all have it. But with our present knowledge we cannot fully reconcile man's free will with God's knowledge of the future. Our minds just aren't big enough.

But we can go part way towards it. This little illustration may help. It is very difficult to predict how adults will behave in a given situation. Little children are simpler; you can quite often predict how they will react. Animals are simpler still; nine times out of ten I can say what my dog is going to do next.

Yet they all have free will. It just happens that it is very hard for us to predict the behaviour of creatures on our own level (adults), but easier to predict the behaviour of creatures far beneath us (dogs).

The gap between dogs and ourselves is great. But the gap between ourselves and the Almighty is far greater. It is quite reasonable to suppose that He can give us free will, and still be able to predict with certainty how we shall use it.

### **Does God Ever Break His Promises?**

A very interesting book was published in the year 1900: a Bible Handbook for the use of unbelievers.<sup>41</sup>

It is an astonishing document. It contains nearly two hundred pages of Bible quotations, arranged by two atheists to provide ammunition for other atheists to shoot at Christians. So-called contradictions, absurdities, indecencies, atrocities-they are all there.

Nearly all of them can be answered quite successfully. I use the book to give my senior Sunday School scholars something to cut their teeth on. What concerns me at this moment is the thirty-four pages of "unfulfilled prophecies and broken promises".

This is an accusation to be taken very seriously. If true, it would undermine the Bible-

believer's foundations. If the Bible is full-as that book alleges-of promises that have been broken, how can we trust it? How can it be inspired? And if it contains lots of unfulfilled prophecies, what then? The force of the arguments in Part One based on fulfilled prophecy would be greatly weakened.

Relax. There is nothing to worry about.

In their preface the atheist writers said that, to ensure accuracy, they cut all their quotations out of printed Bibles with a penknife. Unfortunately, this is not the way to treat the Bible. Bible verses only make sense if you study them in their context, that is, their setting. You need to read the verses on either side of the verse in question. As I have pointed out on several occasions, you also need to make allowance for Hebrew idiom.

These authors have done neither. They have treated each verse as an isolated statement of literal English. In consequence the interpretations they put on many passages are quite ridiculous. For example, they quote the words of Jesus, which were obviously meant to be symbolic:

“Whoso eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood hath eternal life.”<sup>42</sup>

Alongside this they print the absurd comment: “Cannibalism to secure eternal life.”

But many of their “unfulfilled prophecies” really are unfulfilled. They are prophecies-dozens of them-relating to the Second Coming of Christ. Of course they are unfulfilled-as yet.

My purpose in quoting this book is not just to decry it. I want to put on record that in all this collection there is only one “unfulfilled prophecy” that causes me any difficulty.

This is a prophecy in Ezekiel about Egypt which apparently has never come to pass.<sup>43</sup> Perhaps it is to be fulfilled in the future-although this seems rather unlikely. Perhaps the language is intended to be figurative-although this does not look very likely, either. Perhaps we shall have to wait a while for the real solution of the problem.

Think of what this implies. Two good brains wrestled for years, trying to prove the Bible full of unfulfilled prophecies and broken promises. And the result? Only one solitary passage that presents a real problem.

Since so many other problems have been solved in course of time, there is little doubt that this one also will be solved one day.

To the question, “Does God ever break His promises?” only one logical answer is possible. As far as we are able to tell-no!

### ***Is The Bible Unscientific?***

“But what about the scientific objections to the Bible?” asks the unbeliever. “Surely you must admit that a scientist can’t possibly believe everything in the Bible?”

To hear people talk like that, you would think that every scientist was an unbeliever. But this is very far from the truth.

I personally know many well qualified scientists who know the Bible far more intimately than almost any of its detractors. They include two full professors in British universities, and at least a dozen with doctorates awarded for scientific research. Nearly every one of the Bible-reading scientists known to me has come to the conclusion that the whole Bible is true. And there are thousands of other scientists outside my own circle-including some eminent men in their field - who are equally convinced of the truth of the Bible.

Since scientists are divided in their opinions about the Bible, we can afford to look at the matter without prejudice, and form our own opinions. What, then, are the real facts?

First of all, it is important to realise that science and the Bible do not often come into contact. There is no reason why they should. They are concerned with different things.

Science is concerned with the question of *how* things happen. But the Bible tells us *why* things happen.

To appreciate the distinction, consider the question of death. Medical science is gradually unlocking Nature’s mysteries, and explaining what happens in our organs as we grow old and die. This new knowledge is very valuable. It has enabled doctors to combat death so effectively that the average span of human life has been doubled within a century.

But science can never explain (a) why we die, or (b) the way to live for ever. This is the Bible’s job. It tells us:

“The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord.”<sup>1</sup>

In this one verse the Bible explains both (a) why we die-because of sin-and (b) the way to live for ever-by accepting God’s gift.

Thus science and the Bible each have their place. Each tells us something we could not learn from the other. Usually their spheres of interest do not overlap.

But sometimes the two do come into contact. Then the question arises: does the Bible conflict with scientific knowledge?

To answer this question we must look carefully at the two main areas where conflict is said to occur. One of these is in the stories of miracles in the Bible. The other is the account of creation in Genesis.

It is essential to do this in a spirit of reasonableness. There are some Christians who take the attitude, “If science contradicts the Bible, so much the worse for science. Who cares?” And there

are some scientists whose reaction is the exact opposite: "Of course the Bible is unscientific. It's a load of ancient folklore."

Both these shut-minded attitudes are sadly mistaken. They do no service to Christ, to Science, or to Truth. Neither Bible-believers nor scientists have anything to lose from thoughtfully considering the other side's point of view. They have much to gain from doing so.

## Miracles

The general public seems to think that scientists are unusually logical people, with minds as accurate as electronic computers. But those who work among scientists know that this is not true.

We scientists are just as human as anyone else. We make the same foolish mistakes, and we suffer from vanity, impatience and prejudice, just like the rest of mankind.

When a scientist declares that miracles cannot happen, he is not stating a scientific fact. He is merely expressing his own prejudiced opinion. And a thoroughly unscientific opinion it is, too.

Professor Horrobin, a medical scientist who shows no sign of being a Bible-believer, has recently warned his fellow scientists about this. He says:

"The scientist begins with the belief that the universe operates entirely according to law. He begins by believing that unique events which cannot be explained by natural law do not happen. Since by definition, by act of faith, the scientist excludes miracles from the realm of science, he can hardly use science to demonstrate that they cannot occur.

"The non-occurrence of miracles is part of the scientific creed. It is therefore arguing in a circle to say that science demonstrates that miracles do not occur. The premise is the same as the conclusion. . . . I am not saying that true miracles do Occur. All I am showing is that science has not demonstrated that they do not occur, and nor will it ever be able to make such a demonstration."<sup>2</sup>

Horrobin is unquestionably right. Scientists cannot prove that miracles do not occur. They *assume* it.

This is not just perverseness on the part of scientists. We have to make this assumption about our experiments, for a very good reason. We should never make any progress unless we did.

Let me illustrate what I mean. Some years ago medical scientists noticed a horrifying increase in the number of deformed babies being born. They could conceivably have said, "This is a miracle. This is a curse from God on our wicked world."

But that would have gone against the basic principle of science: "Look for the cause." So scientists ruled out the idea of a miracle, and looked for a scientific explanation. They found one. The deformities were being caused by a drug, thalidomide.

It is therefore reasonable, and necessary, for every scientist to say to himself, "I shall assume that miracles are not occurring in my laboratory today."

But some scientists are not content with this. They want to go a big step further. They add, "And I shall also assume that miracles never have occurred, anywhere, and never will." This is not necessary, and not reasonable either. No scientist who has thought the matter out would ever

make such an absurd statement.

Science cannot possibly tell us whether the miracles recorded in the Bible occurred or not. All that science can do is to agree with common sense, and admit that the Bible miracles *could* have occurred.

But is it likely that they really *did*? To answer that question we must look more closely at the facts.

### **The Miracles of the Bible**

The very first thing a scientist looks for in a new theory is what he calls “internal consistency”. In other words, do the various parts of the new theory agree with each other; or does one part contradict another? Before he does anything else, the man who produces a new theory must make sure it is internally consistent.

You would be surprised how many promising new theories fall down because of this. Internal consistency does not prove a theory true. But it does at least give the new theory a chance.

The great thing to remember about the miracle stories of the Bible is this. *They are part of an internally consistent picture.* In other words, they are what you would expect.

Christianity is an altogether miraculous religion. The existence of an inspired Bible is a miracle. The coming of the Son of God into the world was a miracle. His resurrection was a miracle. Our hope of eternal life, in a world where death is the universal rule, is a miracle. The fact that God hears prayer is a miracle.

Against this background, is it surprising that the Son of God, and some of the prophets and apostles, are reported as working some miracles? Of course not. It would have been much more surprising if they hadn't worked any miracles!

There is another important point in favour of accepting the miracle stories of the Bible. They are all so eminently sensible. None of them occurs without a good reason. They all take place in a seemly way.

Most of the miracles of Jesus were miracles of healing. A few involved the most extreme form of healing—restoring the dead to life. On a few occasions He provided food or drink or money for people who needed it. Twice He rescued His disciples from probable shipwreck.

This leaves only one miracle unaccounted for: the cursing of the barren fig tree. And we saw in the previous chapter that there was an extremely good reason for this.

So every single miracle of Jesus was performed for a purpose. Every one was necessary. He never did anything merely to be able to say, “Look, everybody! See what wonderful things I can do.” He was, in fact, tempted to use His power in that way, but refused to do so.<sup>3</sup>

His miraculous birth from a virgin was equally necessary. He had to have one human parent. Otherwise He would not have been able to share our human feelings. But He can, because through His mother He inherited our weak human nature. Consequently, as the New Testament says,

“We have not a High Priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but one who

in every respect has been tempted as we are-yet without sinning.”<sup>4</sup>

Without one human parent He would never have known what temptation was. But if He had had two human parents He could never have conquered every temptation. And the last three words of the quotation above declare that He did conquer all temptations. He had to have one divine Parent to inherit enough strength to do that.

So the virgin birth is not just a wonder-story tacked on to the Gospels as an afterthought. It was an absolute essential to the life and work of Jesus. Without it He could never have been what He was.

This is equally true of His resurrection from the dead. God's plan of salvation revolves around it. Our assurance of eternal life depends upon it, says Paul.<sup>5</sup> And, as we saw in Chapter 7, it provides a powerful argument for belief in the Bible.

All the miracles in the Bible fall into this general pattern. They all have a purpose, even though, in a few cases, the purpose is not obvious at first glance. And they all fit into the overall theme of the Bible, namely, the working out of God's great scheme of redemption for our world.

Bible miracles are on an altogether higher level than the miracles recounted in other ancient books. The book of Tobit, written between 200 and 100 B.C., tells how a demon called Asmodeus slew one after another the seven husbands of a Jewish girl on their wedding nights. But then she married Tobias, and this time the demon was driven off by the smell of burning fish, and so they all lived happily ever after.

If the Bible contained stories like that, we might have something to worry about.

### **Language We Can Understand**

The Bible always recounts miracles in the language of the common man. This again is what you would expect. If God had told us the exact scientific explanation of the miracles we probably should not be able to understand half of them, even today. And earlier generations would not have understood a word of it.

A university lecturer in geography once said to me, “I never like to touch a drop of liquor until the sun goes down.” It would have been childish had I replied, “As a geographer, old man, you should know that the sun doesn't go down; the earth goes round.”

Yet people make just that sort of objection to a story in the Book of Joshua. Towards the close of a successful battle, night was drawing on. Joshua prayed for the opportunity to complete the mopping-up operations. His prayer was answered. The record says: “And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed.”<sup>6</sup>

So the objectors rush in with their fatuous comments. “This teaches that the earth is the centre of the universe, and the sun and moon go round it!”

Or, only one degree less absurd: “This would mean that the earth stopped rotating for a time. That would have been like slamming on the brakes in a bus travelling at a thousand miles an hour. The earth's surface would have been wrecked.”

If Joshua could have heard these comments, how he would have laughed. "Don't be awkward," he might have said. "I merely intended to convey the idea that God miraculously lengthened the daylight for me. I was not concerned with the astronomy, or the physics, of the situation. My readers understood me perfectly, and I don't see why you shouldn't."

Similar principles apply to a number of other miracle stories. When Jesus went to heaven, He went "up". His rising body disappeared into a cloud.<sup>7</sup>

This was not intended to teach that the earth is flat, and that God lives just above the clouds. It conveys a simple message which men of all ages have been able to understand. We live on earth; God lives somewhere else, called heaven.

We do not know, and we need not care, just where that is-or even if it has a location within the "space-time continuum" that scientists speak of. When the work of Jesus on earth was done, He went to join His Father. That is all we need to know.

One more comment, before we leave miracles. Always resist the temptation to pooh-pooh something because it sounds unlikely. Scientists are always coming unstuck when they do that.

When I was a small boy my mother told me of balls of fire that would sometimes descend from the sky during thunderstorms. "Thunderbolts", she called them.

At secondary school I was told that this was an old wives' tale. The standard dictionary of the day<sup>8</sup> said that thunderbolts of this sort were "imaginary", and that settled it.

But not for long. Nowadays thunderbolts are "in" again. They have a new name, "ball lightning", to make them respectable, and eminent scientists publish papers about them.<sup>9</sup>

Some people have never been able to accept the idea that God knows everything. "It's an utter impossibility," they have said, "for any Being, no matter how mighty, to store up all the information there ever was, on every subject."

This sort of objection looks pretty feeble, nowadays. There is a chemical in our bodies, called DNA, that stores up information in its molecules. Those blue eyes you inherited from your mother, for example, were passed on from her to you by a molecule of DNA.

A scientist has described how efficiently DNA holds information.

"The information stored in one man's DNA would, if put into books, require a shelf to hold them so long that it would go round the earth ten million times."<sup>10</sup>

If those shelves were put into a tightly packed library, in book-cases ten shelves high, with gaps only five feet wide between them, the library would fill the whole of Europe and Asia, or nearly half the total land surface of the earth. And that's the amount of information now thought to be stored in your own body.

## **The Flood**

Of all the miracles recorded in the Bible, the biggest by far is the Flood. It is also the one that has provoked the greatest amount of disbelief.

In this particular case the objections are not unreasonable. They deserve careful consideration. If the Biblical Flood ever took place, it ought to have left some traces. Where are they?

In the old days the answer given to this question was, "Everywhere". For many centuries it was thought that the varied surface of the whole earth was just as the Flood had left it. But when men began to study geology, about two centuries ago, problems began to arise. A great deal of evidence was found that showed the structure of the earth's crust has been millions of years forming. The idea of a world-wide flood was gradually abandoned by practically all geologists, for want of evidence.

From time to time some Bible-believer has tried to prove that the foundations of modern geology are quite false, and that the earlier "Flood Theory of Geology" fits the facts better. Price<sup>11</sup> tried this in 1923; Morris and Whitcomb<sup>12</sup> in 1962.

Even many Bible-believers, who would like to be convinced, have found these arguments unconvincing.<sup>13</sup> So it is not surprising that practically all geologists reject the theory of "Flood Geology". Without wishing to dismiss it out of hand, I can only say that it is not an impossible theory but a very unlikely one.

Fortunately there is a much simpler solution to the problem of the Flood. It depends to some extent on a recognition of our old friend, Hebrew idiom.

This affects the issue in two ways. First, as we shall see in Chapter \*3, Hebrew methods of dating were not exact like ours. Because of this we cannot be at all sure when the Flood occurred. It may have been many thousands of years ago.

Secondly, we need to consider the following Biblical statements:

- (a) *All countries* came to Joseph in Egypt to buy corn.<sup>14</sup>
- (b) *The nations under the whole heaven* became afraid of Israel.<sup>15</sup>
- (c) Ahab looked everywhere for Elijah, *missing no nation or kingdom*.<sup>16</sup>
- (d) Nebuchadnezzar ruled *wheresoever the children of men dwelt*.<sup>17</sup>
- (e) Cyrus ruled *all the kingdoms of the earth*.<sup>18</sup>
- (f) In Paul's day the gospel was preached to *every creature under heaven*.<sup>19</sup>

In all six passages the words in italics look like a tremendous overstatement. Obviously they were not intended to be taken literally. We are up against a Hebrew idiom, which can fairly be stated like this:

When the Hebrews spoke of "All the peoples of the earth" (or some such phrase) they often meant it in a limited sense. They meant either "All the peoples with whom we have contact", or "All the peoples with whom God is dealing."

We must take this into account when we read the Genesis record of the Flood. This says that "All the high hills that were under the whole heaven were covered."<sup>20</sup> Does this necessarily include Ben Nevis and the Himalayas and the Rockies, and all the other mountains that Israel had never heard of? In the light of the sayings (a) to (f) quoted above, the answer seems inescapable: no.

Under this watery covering, "All flesh died that moved upon the earth."<sup>21</sup> Did this necessarily include the kangaroos in Australia, and the llamas in South America? To any Hebrew reader the most reasonable answer would again be: no.

This all adds up to one thing. There is nothing in Genesis to prove that the Flood was world-

wide. In the idiom of its Hebrew readers, Genesis indicated that the Flood certainly affected all of that part of the world with which God was dealing. It does not tell us whether or not it affected the rest of the earth.

The cradle of human civilisation was the land of Iraq, and especially the valleys of the Tigris and Euphrates. This is the area where Eden was. This was the country where the Tower of Babel was built. This was Abraham's homeland. This, and the land stretching northward to Ararat,<sup>22</sup> must have been the area where the Flood occurred.

It may have occurred in the days when the whole human race (and I am speaking now of "true men", "sons of Adam"-see Chapter 23) lived in that area. If so, the whole human race except Noah and his family would have perished in the Flood. In this case it must have happened a very long time ago, and any direct evidence of it would seem to have been erased by time.

But there is plenty of geological evidence of an indirect nature to support the possibility of a great flood having occurred in those parts. Some very great earth movements have occurred in this area since the end of the last Ice Age-that is, during the past ten or fifteen thousand years. The region is surrounded by four seas, the Black Sea, the Caspian, the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf. If the whole region was once depressed below sea level, great walls of water would have rushed in from all sides. The Genesis Flood might well have happened in this way.

To sum up, we do not know for sure whether the Flood was worldwide or not. Although there are many obstacles to believing in a world-wide Flood, and no real evidence that one ever occurred, the difficulties can be resolved by regarding the Flood as a more local affair. The idiom of the Old Testament strongly supports such an interpretation.

Consequently there is no reason for disbelieving in the Flood, and one overwhelming reason for believing: Jesus Christ believed in it.<sup>23</sup>

## **Creation**

The Bible starts off with a grand statement: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth."<sup>24</sup>

In the old days men regarded this as an obvious truth. The universe did not come from nowhere. Somebody must have made it. If God did not make it, who did?

But nowadays men are not so simple-minded. They pounce on that word, "somebody". "Why assume it was made by a person?" they ask. "It might just as well have been made by the action of natural forces."

There is one thing wrong with that argument. Scientists have so far failed completely to explain how the universe could have come into being on its own. And even when they try to do so, they still find themselves using the word "creation".

The fly in the atheists' ointment is a scientific law called the Second Law of Thermodynamics. This says that in any system of things, something called "entropy" keeps on increasing. We have found the law to be true for every system we have been able to investigate, from tiny little test-tubes in the laboratory, right up to the world as a whole. There is every reason to suppose that it applies to the solar system, and to the greatest system of all-the universe.

What is this “entropy”? It can only be defined accurately by using the language of mathematics. But it is near enough to say that it means “mixed-upness”. It applies particularly to the mixed-upness of the heat in a system.

For example, when you add cold cream to boiling coffee, the cream warms up and the coffee cools down. Very soon you have a cup of “coffee-with-cream”, all at the same temperature. Now try and get back your cold cream and boiling coffee. Obviously, you can't. Why not? Because mixed-upness always increases, never decreases.

Think of your house and garden as a self-contained system. In winter you have a nice warm house in an unpleasantly cold garden. Go away for a week, and leave the house to itself. It cools down to the temperature of the garden. The “entropy”, mixed-upness, of the system has increased.

As soon as you come home you set to work to put things right. You want to reduce the mixed-upness, and make the house hotter than the garden again. There is only one way you can do this. You could, if you were desperate, burn your furniture and floorboards. But this would not last long. Sooner or later you would have to bring in a source of heat-coal, gas, oil, electricity-from *outside*. There is nothing you can do *inside* a closed system to reduce its mixed-upness.

Bringing in heat from outside is fine for you. But it is not so good for the world as a whole. Every time you heat your house you help to increase the mixed-upness of the world. One day all the world's sources of heat-coal, and oil, and natural gas, and uranium for atomic power stations, and any other sources we may yet discover-will all be used up. The earth's mixed-upness will have become complete.

There will then be only one hope for the future. We shall have to bring in heat from outside. This would mean relying on the sun as our only source of heat.

But the sun is losing weight at a tremendous rate. It is millions of tons lighter now than when you started reading this chapter. One day the sun's resources will all be finished. Then the mixed-upness of the solar system will have reached its limit.

After that we might, if we were clever enough, bring in energy from outside the solar system. But this would only increase the mixed-upness of the universe as a whole. Eventually the mixed-upness of the whole universe would be complete.

And that would be that.

I have been speaking as if Man were solely responsible for increasing the mixed-upness of the universe. In fact he is only making a very small contribution to Nature's own programme. The universe is increasing its own mixed-upness by natural processes at a fantastic rate, without any help from us.

This means that the universe can be likened to a wrist watch, steadily ticking away. There are, however, two very different theories as to what kind of a wrist watch it is. Some scientists regard it as being like an ordinary wrist watch, that was wound up once and will go on running down until it stops. A second group of scientists think of it as more like a self-winding watch, that will go on ticking away for ever.

But in both theories the scientists cannot quite get away from the need for a Creator. In both

theories they still use the word “creation”, despite themselves.

The first theory is often called the theory of the “Big Bang Universe”. According to this theory there must have been a time, long ago, when the “watch” was first “wound up”; that is, when the universe was at its starting point, as un-mixed-up as it could possibly be. One leading adherent to this theory, Professor A. R. Ubbelohde of London University, shows no sign of wanting to uphold a belief in God. Yet in a book dealing with this topic, he describes the universe’s starting point as: “The Heat Birth of the world, in a kind of luminous dawn of creation in time.”<sup>25</sup>

In another part of the same book he discusses whether we might ever be able to reverse the universal tendency towards increasing mixed-upness. By a highly mathematical argument he shows that we cannot, but that it might be done by “intelligent beings not dependent on our ordinary methods”<sup>26</sup>

Apart from the use of the plural, this reads like an excellent definition of God. “Intelligent beings not dependent on our methods”, indeed! How determined to resist the obvious can you get? Why can’t the Professor say, “The Creator could do it”?

The other theory of the universe is officially called the “Steady-State Universe” theory. But, in practice, its adherents prefer to use a more descriptive title: “The Continuous-Creation Universe”.<sup>27</sup>

This theory proposes that, to keep the mixed-upness of the universe constant, fresh matter is being created throughout the universe all the time. The amount needed would be vast. The Astronomer Royal estimated it at the equivalent of 50,000 bodies the size of our sun, being created *every second*.<sup>28</sup> Yet the theory does not explain how this matter could be created, or what (or who) is doing the creation.

Which takes more faith? To believe in a theory like this? Or to believe that “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth”?

### **A Six-Day Job?**

“It’s not the actual fact of creation that bothers me,” said Larry. “I can accept that easily enough. What I can’t swallow is the teaching of Genesis that God did the whole job in six days, just a few thousand years ago.”

A great many people will sympathise with Larry. If Genesis really did teach this, then it would be in head-on collision with the facts of science. And by, “facts of science”, I mean facts; not just theories, or opinions, but well established facts.

Many of the statements trotted out by scientists about prehistoric events are only opinions. I shall be discussing some of these in the next two chapters, where the origin of life will be considered.

But we cannot treat the facts of geology like this. Many lines of evidence show that the earth is immensely old. Much of this evidence is too technical to discuss here. Some of it is extremely simple.

The earth’s crust abounds in fossils. These are pieces of rock bearing traces of plant or animal

life. For instance, coal is fossilised vegetation. Although only a small part of the earth's crust has been explored, a million million tons of coal have already been discovered.

That may not sound very much, but it is actually enough to provide half a bucketful for every square yard of the earth's surface. And a far greater quantity of coal must still lie undiscovered. It is obvious that countless generations of plants and animals must have lived and died to produce all the fossils in the earth.

Some Christian writers have disputed this. They have argued that perhaps all these fossils were produced at one time, either at the time of the Flood or of some earlier worldwide disaster. But this is quite impossible. Coal is almost pure carbon, whilst vegetation contains only a small proportion of carbon. Consequently it must have taken something like a ton of vegetation to produce a hundredweight of coal. Even if Noah had lived when the earth was completely covered with dense jungle, there would still not have been nearly enough vegetation in his world to produce all the coal that exists today.

Others have suggested that God created all these fossils just to mislead scientists. This obviously will not do. As one Christian writer has said about this, "God is not the Author of a lie—even a white lie."<sup>29</sup>

There is a better way to approach the problem. That is, to accept the evidence that the earth is many millions of years old, and then to have another look at Genesis to see what it really does tell us.

We must begin by realising that Genesis was never intended to teach science. It was written in very simple language, to teach some profound truths to all mankind. Those simple words made sense to the Hebrews in the dawn of civilisation. The marvel is that they still make a very favourable impression on many scientists today.

The simplicity of the language is itself remarkable. It is said that the vocabulary of Genesis 1 contains only seventy-six root words, in the original Hebrew.<sup>30</sup> Just what is this simple language trying to tell us?

We have already had a number of lessons in not jumping to conclusions. Hebrew is a highly figurative language, full of word-pictures and figures of speech which are not intended to be taken literally. Hebrew idiom is quite different from English idiom.

So there is no simple answer to the question, "What does Genesis 1 teach?" The general picture is quite clear. It teaches that God created the universe and everything in it. But when we try to understand the details, various possibilities arise.

*One suggestion is that the chapter describes a re-creation, not the original creation of the earth. It begins with a picture of an earth "without form and void". This expression is used by Jeremiah in a passage where he is talking about a land brought to destruction.<sup>31</sup> So, this theory suggests, the earth was teeming with life in earlier geological ages, and then, for some reason, God wiped everything out. Then He restored it to working order, as described in Genesis 1.*

There are many variations on this theme. It has fairly recently been advocated by Dr. L. M. Davies, a geologist with high qualifications.<sup>32</sup> He argued that the withdrawal of the sun's light brought on a sort of "super ice age", long before the ice ages of recent times. This would have destroyed every living thing, and set the stage for the events described in Genesis 1.

## When is a Day Not a Day?

There are two major objections to all these “re-creation” theories. First, they depend upon a global disaster so tremendous as to wipe out every vestige of life on earth-and yet so gentle as to have left no record to show geologists that it ever occurred.

Secondly, Genesis 1 does not seem like a re-creation story. It reads like a record of the entire creation as we know it. In the days when scientists were not ashamed to refer to the Bible, one wrote in a leading scientific journal:

“The order in which the flora and fauna are said, by the Mosaic account [the Genesis story, written by Moses] to have appeared upon the earth, corresponds with that which the theory of Evolution requires, and the evidence of geology proves.”<sup>33</sup>

This is broadly, though not precisely, true. We must also explain the appearance of the sun, moon and stars on the “fourth day” of Genesis -that is, about half way through the work of creation. This can be done fairly simply. It probably means that they became visible at that time, through the thinning mists of the cooling earth’s atmosphere.

The order of events in Genesis 1 then becomes remarkably close to the order that a modern geologist would draw up. Many scientists have been deeply impressed by this similarity. It seems far too great to be a mere coincidence. No, it seems almost undeniable that Genesis 1 is a broad picture of the entire geological history of the earth-and a remarkably accurate one, at that.

In that case, what are we going to do about those six days?

In our day and age that should present no problem. (What’s that-”our *day* and age”? Evidently here is one expression where a day is not a day.)

Now consider Genesis 2: 4, which concludes the record of creation with a one-sentence summary:

“These are the generations (the story) of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, *in the day* that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens.”

So Genesis evidently uses “day” in a figurative sense. The whole process took six days. Yet those six days added up to only one day. If a day always means a day, then this arithmetic becomes impossible. But if a day means “a period”, everything makes sense.

Moreover, during the first five-and-a-bit of those six days there were no men or women upon the earth. Those “days”, therefore, are unlikely to have been days measured on a human scale. They must surely have been *days measured on God’s scale-and* those are very different from the days we know.

In two places the Bible warns us that God’s time scale is far greater than ours. Peter says that “one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.”<sup>34</sup>

Moses stretches out the time scale still further, when he says that “a thousand years in Thy (God’s) sight are . . . as a watch in the night.”<sup>35</sup>

These statements are obviously not meant to be taken as literal scales, like the “one inch to one mile” of an Ordnance Survey map. They are merely warnings, expressed in poetic language, that

the eternal God is not bound by the same time scale as ourselves. So one way of solving our problem is to say that the world was created in six “divine days”. And those days can be as long as the geologists want to make them.

But there is an even better way of viewing Genesis 1. The “days” may not have been the actual days when God *did the work* of creation. They could have been the days on which God *revealed the story* of creation to one of His inspired historians. This idea goes back to a nineteenth-century German, J. H. Kurtz, and has been worked out in great detail by a modern archaeologist.<sup>36</sup>

If we view Genesis 1 in this way, practically all the problems disappear. It harmonises with the teaching of the rest of the Bible. It enables every scientist to hold up his head and say, as did the first astronauts ever to approach the moon: “IN THE BEGINNING, GOD CREATED THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH.”<sup>37</sup>

To many a scientist this not only makes sense. It solves a problem that science cannot touch.

### ***Why Some Biologists Think Darwin Was Wrong***

I can see him now, sitting in my office with his jaw hanging down. The look of horror on his face was matched by the tone of his voice.

“You don’t mean to say you actually don’t believe in evolution?” He was a fellow scientist from a British university, come to discuss the research I was doing. We got on famously for a few hours. And then he happened to mention evolution, and I told him what I thought about it.

He could not have been more shocked if I had said I did not believe in the Law of Gravity. When I added that plenty of biologists as well qualified as himself (he had a doctorate in a biological science) shared my views, he just would not believe me. We parted good friends, but I think he still considers me a trifle mad.

The trouble was that he was an Expert-Worshipper. We saw in Chapter 13 that experts are usually right about facts, but very frequently wrong in their opinions. And unfortunately they have got the public just where they want it-accepting the experts’ opinions as if they were unquestionable.

(If you cannot recall to mind the evidence produced in Chapter 13, it would be a good idea to read it again, now. It forms a very necessary introduction to this chapter and the next one.)

I gave him four reasons why I, as a scientist, regard the theory of evolution as one of the most unlikely theories I know.

(1) Several eminent biologists have shot holes through it.

(2) Other eminent biologists have admitted that they only hold it for philosophical reasons, not because the biological evidence is sound.

(3) There is not just one version of the theory of evolution, but a hundred and one. Many gaps have to be filled in by guesswork, and the guesses change from biologist to biologist and from day to day.

(4) There are a number of serious objections to the theory, that no biologist has yet answered.

I shall expand each of these four reasons below, but only briefly. There are plenty of specialist books on the subject where the evidence is set out in more detail.<sup>1-2</sup> Before launching out on these reasons, one thing needs to be made clear. The word “evolution” means different things to different people. People use the word in engineering, for instance.

You can see a collection of aeroplanes, from the earliest to the most modern, in the aviation section of the Smithsonian Museum at Washington. This collection is said to illustrate the “evolution” of the modern aircraft. But nobody supposes that each successive generation of aircraft gave birth to the next.

As we saw in the previous chapter, there is evidence that life has been on the earth for millions of years. The simpler forms of life came first, the more complicated later. In some natural history museums you can see fossils of these ancient animals lined up, from the earliest to

the latest.

Some people use the word “evolution” to describe the mere existence of these fossils. If that is how you use the word, well and good. I shall not use it that way myself, because I think it is misleading. Personally, I prefer to speak of the “progressive creation” of both the aircraft and the fossil animals. But the most scientific expression is “progressive appearance”, because it is completely neutral.

I shall use the word “evolution” in one way only: to mean “evolution by natural processes alone”. In other words, to describe the belief that God played no active part in the development of life on this earth. This is the way biologists commonly use the word. This is the way it is used by the writers whose words I shall quote.

All the quotations that follow are from scientific books and journals. None of them was written with any religious purpose in mind, so far as I have been able to tell.

### **(1) Biologists Who Doubt Evolution**

If you have a biologist friend who is hooked on evolution, persuade him to go to France for a year. He will come back a changed man. French biology has for many years been in a turmoil over evolution.

A few years ago an American scientific journal reviewed the scene in France.

“This year saw the controversy rapidly growing, until recently it culminated in the title, ‘Should We Burn Darwin?’ spread over two pages of the magazine *Science et Vie*.

“The article, by the science writer Aimé Michel, was based on the author’s interviews with such specialists as Mrs. Andrée Tetry, professor at the famous *Ecole des Hautes Etudes* and a world authority on problems of evolution, Professor René Chauvin and other noted French biologists ...

“Aimé Michel’s conclusion is significant: the classical theory of evolution in its strict sense belongs to the past. Even if they do not publicly take a definite stand, almost all French specialists hold today strong mental reservations as to the validity of natural selection.”<sup>3</sup>

In 1960 an evolutionist upset his fellow evolutionists. His “crime” was that of being too honest. He published a book<sup>4</sup> mildly pointing out that many of the arguments on which evolution was based were unsound. He did not reject evolution out of hand. He merely declared that it was “not a proved fact”. He said, in effect, “For pity’s sake let’s hurry up and find some decent arguments to base it on.”

But the most impressive testimony of all has come from one of the world’s most distinguished biologists. The late Dr. W. R. Thompson was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society—the greatest scientific honour in the British Commonwealth. He held the important post of Director of the Commonwealth Institute of Biological Control.

Because of his high standing, he was invited to write the introduction to a new edition of Darwin’s *Origin of Species* which was published in 1956. If you would like an authoritative statement of where the theory of evolution stood then, you should read Dr. Thompson’s introduction for yourself. It will probably amaze you.

He drew the following conclusions:

- (1) That the general public should be warned to take the theory of evolution with a large grain of salt, because it is still a long, long way from being proved.
- (2) That respectable scientific theories are based on solid facts, but the theory of evolution is based on a weird hotchpotch of facts and guesswork.
- (3) Biologists are even guilty of deceiving the general public, by deliberately suppressing the true facts about the theory of evolution.

Here are some of Dr. Thompson's actual statements. (The italics are mine.)

"Evolution, if it has occurred, can in a rather loose sense be called a historical process; and therefore to show that it has occurred historical evidence is required. History in the strict sense is dependent on human testimony. Since this is not available with respect to the development of the world of life we must be satisfied with something less satisfactory.

"It does appear to me, in the first place, that Darwin in the 'Origin' was not able to produce palaeontological evidence sufficient to prove his views, but that the evidence he did produce was adverse to them; and I may note that the position is not notably different today. The modern Darwinian palaeontologists are obliged, just like their predecessors and like Darwin, to water down *the facts* with subsidiary hypotheses which, however plausible, are in the nature of things unverifiable.

"The advent of the evolutionary idea, due mainly to the 'Origin', very greatly stimulated biological research. But it appears to me that owing precisely to the nature of the stimulus, a great deal of this work was directed into unprofitable channels or devoted to the pursuit of will-o'-the-wisps. *I am not the only biologist of this opinion.*

"A long-enduring and regrettable effect of the success of the 'Origin' was *the addiction of biologists to unverifiable speculation.*

"As we know, *there is a great divergence of opinion among biologists*, not only about the causes of evolution but even about the actual process. *This divergence exists because the evidence is unsatisfactory and does not permit any certain conclusions.* It is therefore right and proper to draw the attention of the non-scientific public to the disagreements about evolution. But some recent remarks of evolutionists show that they think this unreasonable. This situation, where scientific men rally to the defence of a doctrine they are unable to define scientifically, much less demonstrate with scientific rigour, *attempting to maintain its credit with the public by the suppression of criticism and the elimination of difficulties*, is abnormal and undesirable in science.

"Thus are engendered those fragile towers of hypotheses based on hypotheses, where *fact and fiction mingle in an inextricable con-fusion.* That these constructions correspond to a natural appetite there can be no doubt. It is certain also that in the 'Origin' Darwin established what may be called the classical method of satisfying this appetite. *We are beginning to realise now that the method is unsound* and the satisfaction illusory. But to understand our own thinking, *to see what fallacies we must eradicate in order to establish general biology on a scientific basis*, we can still return with profit to the source-book which is 'The Origin of Species'."<sup>5</sup>

Did you ever read anything like it? It is doubtful whether anything to match it has occurred in the recent history of science. Here is a world authority setting out to expose the sorry state of his own branch of science, and to warn the general public that the wool is being pulled over people's eyes.

Now compare this with the words that follow. They were written only a few years earlier by another famous man, H. G. Wells.

## (2) **Biologists Who Walk by Faith, not Fact**

“One thing is certain. Not one fact has ever emerged, in a stupendous accumulation of facts, to throw a shadow of doubt upon what is still called the “Theory” of organic evolution. No rational mind can question the invincible nature of the evolutionary case.”<sup>6</sup>

Well, well. As Hamlet’s mother would have said, the gentleman doth protest too much, me thinks. H. G. Wells was a qualified scientist and a respected historian. He was far too intelligent and well-read a man not to know the truth about evolution. Why should he overstate his case in that blustering fashion?

There is one obvious explanation. Look at it this way. Throughout this book I have tried to be fair. Where a particular argument against the Bible is childish, I have said so. Where an objection is weighty I have admitted it, and said it needs careful examination. Occasionally I have admitted that, as yet, a certain problem cannot be solved.

Suppose that, instead of doing this, I had used Mr. Wells’ tactics. Suppose I had used his very words in defence of my own case, like this:

“Not one fact has ever emerged, in a stupendous accumulation of facts, to throw a shadow of doubt upon the Bible. No rational mind can question the invincible nature of the Bible-believer’s case.”

Whatever would you have thought of me? You would have said to yourself, “Poor fellow. His religious fervour has got the better of him. His judgement as a scientist has all gone to pot.” And you would have been right.

Isn’t it obvious that this criticism applies to Mr. Wells, who actually did use this language? He was well known for his strong views as an atheist. Evidently his religious fervour or irreligious fervour or whatever you call the fervour of an atheist-must have affected his attitude to evolution.

Professor Kenneth Walker is another popular author who plugged evolution in his books. Fortunately he was not so starry-eyed about it as Wells. He frankly admitted why he and others accepted Darwin’s theory:

“Darwin’s theory of evolution is retained because scientists have found nothing more satisfactory to put in its place. A mechanical explanation of the procession of life on this planet is required and no such explanation, other than that offered by Darwin, is forthcoming. This being so, *there is no alternative to that of retaining Darwinism with all its weaknesses.*”<sup>7</sup>  
(The italics are mine.)

He spoke for many other evolutionists besides himself. A “mechanical explanation”—that is, one that leaves God out of account—was “required”. By hook or by crook some explanation acceptable to an atheist had to be found. Darwin’s explanation was a poor one, but it had to fill

the gap. It was the best of a bad lot.

Another evolutionist has told some interesting tales in a recent magazine article:

“Not long ago a professor wrote an article questioning a former teacher, in the mildest possible terms, about the authenticity of a certain find-and ended a friendship of thirty years. On another occasion an eminent anthropologist arose to speak at a meeting given in his honour, and began reminiscing about the early days of his career when his ideas concerning human evolution had been ignored. But he managed to complete only a few sentences of his talk. Then, overcome by the recollection of years of frustration, he lowered his head and burst into tears. Investigators have stalked out of meetings, indulged in personal vituperation (in technical journals, as well as privately), argued over priorities, accused colleagues of stealing their ideas.

“Such behaviour may be somewhat less common than it once was, and it is by no means unknown in other areas of science, but its incidence has been strikingly high among pre-historians. The reason for this occupational ailment is obscure, but *it may have something to do with the shortage of solid evidence.*”<sup>8</sup> (The italics are mine.)

### (3) The Way they Change their Views

Take a good look at the picture facing page 216. It may be the last of its kind you will see.

You have seen pictures like it before, of course. They appear in school text books and children's encyclopaedias, as well as in more sophisticated volumes.

Those things lolloping around in the water like a group of Loch Ness Monsters are called “brontosaurus”. There is no doubt that creatures like this existed. There are plenty of brontosaurus fossils, some of them practically complete.

The imaginary part of the picture is not the animals, but the water. In 1971 a paper was published in a top-level scientific journal, “proving” that brontosaurus didn't like swimming after all.<sup>9</sup> The old ideas were “convincingly demolished” commented the editor. Brontosaurus weren't long-necked hippopotamuses as was previously thought, but just prehistoric giraffes, so to speak.

One of the really great problems for evolutionists is how life began. Once upon a time there was a young planet, steaming hot and lifeless. It cooled down a bit. Then, presto! life appeared, says the evolutionist. But how?

One snag is that “dead” matter is composed of very small molecules. Somehow or other, before life could even think of appearing on the stage, thousands of small molecules had to gang up together and form one big molecule. How did they manage it?

For some time experimental scientists were baffled. Their attempts in the laboratory to conduct shotgun marriages between small molecules were frustrated. Then came a breakthrough. They found that small molecules were quite happy to hold hands with each other under one condition: there must be no oxygen around. But one fifth of the air we breathe consists of oxygen. Wouldn't that put paid to any chance of molecules joining up?

In 1965 two scientists, L. V. Berkner and L. C. Marshall, came up with a brilliant solution. They “proved” that the amount of oxygen in the air has been steadily increasing; in the far-off

days when life appeared, there was practically no oxygen present at all. Evolutionists were jubilant, and showered Berkner and Marshall with praise.

Their joy was somewhat premature. In 1970 R. T. Brinkman of the California Institute of Technology spoilt everything. He had re-examined the Berkner and Marshall theory, and found that they had got their sums wrong. There was thousands of times more oxygen in the air when life appeared than Berker and Marshall had thought.

In an article describing the impact of Brinkman's work, a scientist concluded: "Brinkman's result precludes biological evolution as presently understood."<sup>10</sup>

In simple English that means, "The theory of evolution, as we now understand it, won't work." Yet hardly an evolutionist turned a hair. Presumably they are so used to that sort of thing happening that it does not worry them any more.

It is a pity that the layman is unable to follow the controversies in the biological journals. If he could, he would realise that the foundations of evolution are as firm as quicksands in a hurricane.

Fortunately, we are not entirely dependent on the technical press. Evolutionists often Write books for the general public. You only need to read a few of these with an open mind to realise the true situation.

A popular book of this kind is *The Naked Ape*, by Dr. Desmond Morris.<sup>11</sup> It is his attempt to explain in simple language what evolutionists believe about man.

In one chapter he poses the question in the book's title: why are we naked? Why don't we have hairy bodies, like our supposed ancestors?

He outlines six theories which evolutionists have used to explain this.

(1) Because we are able to keep cleaner, and hence healthier, with our smooth skins. So the dirty, parasite-infested ape-man with his nasty hairy coat died off, while the sleek clean true-man survived.

(2) Because Man no longer needed a fur coat when he mastered fire. It became more of a liability than an asset, so it gradually faded away.

(3) All animals are more or less hairless before they are born. For some unexplained reason, Man finally decided to stay in the before-birth condition all his life.

(4) Because the particular ape-man from which we are descended was an aquatic creature, That is to say, he spent most of his time in the water, like a seal. And who would dream of going swimming in a fur coat?

(5) Because his bare skin formed a convenient signalling device, thus giving him an advantage over his competitors.

(6) Because he was originally a meat-eater, who had to catch his dinner each day. The world's climate grew warmer, and the hairy ape-man found his coat just too much for high-performance athletics. So, more often than not, the dinner got away. The poor old hairy one starved into extinction. But because the suitably attired true-man could run like lightning, he grew fat and prospered.

Dr. Morris helpfully explains which five of these theories are Wrong, and why the one he believes in is "right".

You should read stuff like this occasionally. You will find it entertaining. And it will let you see how an evolutionist's mind works.

But remember as you read to keep asking yourself the sixty-four thousand dollar question: "Is this science? Or science-fiction?"

#### (4) Questions Evolution Has Not Answered

It was pointed out in Chapter 12 that you expect to find some unsolved problems in every field of knowledge. There are some problems about the Bible that Bible-believers have not yet solved.

The trouble with the theory of evolution is that the problems are such big ones, and there are so many of them. An article in a recent issue of *New Scientist* began like this:

“Though it is nearly a century since Darwin wrote his treatise *On the Origin of Species*, there are still a few weak points in the theory of evolution. Often evolution seems to have made huge jumps, leaving no traces of any intervening steps and no hint that anything but the complete system could have functioned at all.”<sup>12</sup>

This statement is very revealing. It shows the extent to which evolutionists have brain-washed themselves. Carefully compare the first and second sentences, and note the differences.

If “often” at the start of Sentence 2 is the right word (which it is) then “a few weak points” in Sentence 1 is a shocking understatement. There are a lot, not a few.

But that is not all. If “evolution has made huge jumps, leaving no traces of any intervening steps and no hint that anything but the complete system could have functioned at all” are these “weak points” or tremendous obstacles?

This is the sort of “weak point” that he was referring to. A mother whale has a most extraordinary nipple. She needs it because she feeds her babies under water. The nipple is designed to keep the sea-water out of the baby whale’s sucking mouth, while letting the mother’s milk in.

Ask an engineer to design you a whale’s feeding bottle, to do the same job. He would say, “But that will cost you thousands. It would be terribly difficult to produce such a complex mechanism. And it would be sure not to work first time. We should have to go through a long programme of trials, to get it just right.”

Yet Mrs. Whale’s nipple had to work first time. Otherwise Junior would have got a mouthful of salt water instead of milk, and whales would soon have become extinct. A half-developed whale nipple would be worse than useless. If the whale nipple evolved it must have done so in one mighty leap-from nothing, to perfection, in one go.

But can anyone call such a great leap forward “evolution”? Wouldn’t “creation” be a better name for it? The whole idea of evolution depends on progress by lots of *small steps*, each one small enough to occur by blind chance.

There are certainly hundreds, probably thousands, of equally complex organs that would have been of little or no use until fully formed. The little archer fish is able to shoot a jet of water several feet into the air, to bring down an insect for his supper. He is a crack shot. He should be, because he has a very special pair of eyes, quite unlike those of most fish.

Thus he possesses three things: (1) Those special eyes (2) His water pistol (3) The skill to use it. Until he had all three, the other two were no use to him. They must have come to him all three at once. How? Even now he has it, he does not really need this extraordinary equipment. He can

survive perfectly well without it, by eating insects that happen to fall into the water. Yet evolution insists that the need for survival is the force behind all natural development!

Migrating birds find their way back to their old nests, thousands of miles away. How did they develop this extraordinary skill? Biologists don't even know how they do it, let alone how they could have evolved the ability to do it.

Zoologists would probably disagree, saying, "Yes, we do know how they do it. They steer by the stars."

What do they mean, steer by the stars? No doubt that is part of the answer. But is it the whole story? Of course not. I should like to see a biologist find his way to one particular tree in a forest five thousand miles away, "steering by the stars".

Another problem badly needing an answer is that of the time scale of evolution. Development rarely goes at the right speed to suit the theory. It either takes place far too rapidly (in these enormous jumps we have just looked at) or else it goes far too slowly.

The horse is a case in point. This animal may be a fast runner, but it has been a dreadfully slow evolver. We have a splendid "family tree" of fossils for it. The sequence starts with a little fellow called Eohippus, who is supposed to have lived about fifty million years ago, and works through a series of intermediate sizes until we get the present-day horse.

But the world's record for slow evolving is held by a fish called the coelacanth. Fossil remains indicate that this lived some two or three hundred million years ago. For many years scientists thought it had died out two million centuries ago. Then in 1939 a South African professor, J. L. B. Smith, discovered that specimens of this "extinct" species were still swimming happily around the Indian Ocean. Evidently with this fish evolution has stood still for two hundred million years.

As the director of Madagascar's Institute of Scientific Research commented:

"Throughout hundreds of millions of years the coelacanths have kept the same form and structure. Here is *one of the great mysteries of evolution....*"<sup>13</sup> (The italics are mine.)

Now the length of time life is thought to have been on earth is in the region of a thousand million years. This cannot, of course, be anything other than the roughest of rough estimates. But let's assume that it, and the estimated ages of Eohippus and the coelacanth, are correct.

Then what is the total length of time available for the first blob of jelly to have evolved into a man? Only five times as long as the coelacanth has been lounging around, doing nothing. Only twenty times as long as it took a small horse to evolve into a big horse. Obviously somebody has some explaining to do.

### **Man-A Unique Creature**

Of all the "big jumps" that evolution has failed to explain, one stands out above the rest: the gap that separates man from the animals.

Even that high priest of Evolution, Sir Julian Huxley, has admitted that this is so. He says:

“Only along one single line is progress and its future possibility being continued—the line of man. If man were wiped out *it is in the highest degree improbable that the step to conceptual thought would again be taken* even by his nearest kin. After 1,500 million years of evolution progress hangs on but a single thread. That thread is the human germ-plasm.”<sup>14</sup> (The italics are mine.)

In other words, the appearance of man was a most unlikely event. It was so utterly improbable that it will almost certainly never happen again. The evolutionist has no idea how this highly improbable event occurred. Yet his prejudice compels him to dismiss out of hand the obvious explanation—that Divine Power might have caused it.

In particular, there are three things that form an unbridgeable gulf between man and the animals:

- (a) The power of abstract thought
- (b) Moral and religious sense
- (c) Language

None of these can be explained by the evolutionary principle of “survival of the fittest”. The invention of philosophy, and logic, and higher mathematics (yes, and the theory of evolution) are the outcome of our ability to think abstractly. But they did not help our ancestors to survive.

Nor did the development of man’s moral sense. Jesus said, “The meek shall inherit the earth.”<sup>15</sup> This is true if we take into account the age to come. But it does not make evolutionary sense today. By and large, trying to live up to Christ’s high moral standards is a hindrance to survival. This is particularly true of primitive societies, where “might is right” still prevails.

Above all, evolutionists are completely baffled by man’s ability to speak. On any sort of evolutionary theory, language should have started with, “Grrr, snarl”, and worked its way up. It should have become more and more complex as time went by.

But the evidence points the other way. *Languages nearly always grow simpler with use.*

English is a good example. It has three main parents: Latin, Anglo-Saxon, and Norman French. The earliest English we can understand is that of Chaucer’s time (about 600 years ago). His English had a simpler grammatical structure than the parent languages. Since his day our language has become simpler still.

This tendency to grow simpler with time can be seen in many “developing” languages. Nevertheless there are thousands of different languages in the world today, many of them almost incredibly complex. How did they arise? Nobody can say.

Or, rather, nobody but Bible-believers can say. There is a perfectly reasonable explanation in the Bible. It fits the facts. Only prejudice prevents men from accepting it.

In the beginning, God created the first man with the power of speech. His children had only one language. Then God said:

“Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech. So the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth.”<sup>16</sup>

What is true of language applies also to the many forms of life on earth. The evolutionists have not really begun to explain how all these complex living things could have evolved on their own. Again and again they reach a point where the evidence calls for an admission: “There must have

been some Creative Hand behind this.” And yet they remain unwilling to admit it, not because of the facts but because of their prejudices.

Fortunately there is no need for us to wear blinkers like them. It is necessary to accept the facts of science. It is not necessary to accept the opinions of certain scientists, not even when they are palmed off as so-called facts. Genesis 1 may have suffered a thousand attacks. But it has come through them all, unscathed.

As we saw in the previous chapter, Genesis 1 does not set out to tell us *how* God created the world and everything in it; or *when* He did it; or *how long* He took to do it. But this it does tell us, and this many a scientist believes:

“And God said, ‘Let the earth bring forth the living creature after its kind, cattle and creeping thing and beast of the earth after its kind.’ And it was so.”<sup>17</sup>

### ***How the Human Race Began***

In the third chapter of the gospel of Luke there is a list of Jesus Christ's ancestors. His descent is traced back through David, Abraham and Noah to "Seth, which was the son of Adam, which was the son of God."<sup>1</sup>

Who was this Adam? We open our Bibles at Genesis chapter ~ and read of his creation as the very first man. We turn over to chapter 3 and read that his wife was "the mother of all living". If our Bible is an old-fashioned edition we see the date at the top of the page:  
4004 B.C.

Then we shake our heads. How can we possibly believe this? Wasn't there already a flourishing civilisation in Egypt in 4004 B.C.? Were not cave men living in the south of France in ten or twenty thousand B.C.? And various kinds of shaggy ape-men, long before that?

This is a very real problem. It is probably the biggest, most serious problem that the Bible-believing Christian has to face. But even so, with patience and careful thought a solution can be found.

One thing we dare not do. We must not take the easy way out and say, "Adam was just a myth." That way lies disaster.

I have tried to show throughout this book that we must let the Bible speak for itself. We must not twist it, to make it mean what we think it ought to have said. We must let it make its own message clear to us.

It is necessary to make due allowance for figures of speech in the Bible. We must not treat poetry as if it were prose, or parables as if they were literal truth. We need to be very, very careful not to read the Bible as if it had been written by Englishmen; instead, we must read it in the light of the Hebrew idiom that shines through into the English translation.

And, above all, we simply must let the New Testament provide us with the key to the Old. If we doubt what Jesus and His apostles taught about the Old Testament, we shall end up doubting them in other matters too. Our faith will then prove to be a house built on sand.

So we have to begin with the question: what does the New Testament say about Adam?

The answer is sharply defined, clear and unmistakable.

Adam was a real person. He and his wife, Eve, were the ancestors of the whole human race.

Several lines of evidence lead to this conclusion. There are the words quoted from Luke's Gospel in the first paragraph of this chapter.<sup>1</sup> There is the way that Jesus referred to Adam and Eve. He spoke of them in the same literal way as the other historical characters of the Old Testament.<sup>2</sup>

Above all, there is the teaching of Paul. As was shown in Chapter 14, his whole teaching about sin and death and salvation had two foundation stones. One was a historical Adam, whose sin started a pattern of sinfulness that has affected all his descendants. The other was a historical Jesus, who came to save some of the sons of Adam from sin and death, and give them everlasting life.<sup>3</sup>

Remove one of those twin foundations and the whole structure of Christianity collapses. If Adam's sin was a myth, then Christ's righteousness might have been a myth, too.

One thing is certain: Christianity-that is, real Christianity, Biblical Christianity, the Christianity of Christ and His apostles-starts with the sad, true story of events in the Garden of Eden.

This is our starting point. Within this framework we must look for a solution to our problem.

A number of solutions have been suggested, but I shall not list them all. Most of them have serious snags attached. The one I shall describe is the one that seems most reasonable to me.

It appeals to me for two reasons. First and foremost, it is based upon careful Bible exposition, and (unlike some of the other proposed solutions) not merely upon a superficial reading of the English text. Secondly, it makes better scientific sense than any other suggestion that has come my way.

### **How Long Ago Was Adam?**

In a way, the problem is largely an artificial one. That date, 4004 B.C., is not a part of the original Bible at all. It was put there in the seventeenth century by Archbishop Ussher, who worked out what he thought was the actual date of creation.

Here and there the Bible fails to supply the exact figures the Archbishop needed for his calculations. So he had to make a few assumptions. But for a long time most Bible-believers thought that he was right to within a century or two.

Many Bible-believers still think so. And this is at the root of our problem. Because it was shown more than eighty years ago that the Archbishop was probably wrong, not by hundreds but by thousands of years.

This was clearly demonstrated by a Bible-believing scholar, W. H.Green.<sup>4</sup> His discoveries were taken up and amplified by Urquhart, in a book crammed with first-class Biblical exposition.<sup>5</sup> Summaries of these ideas can be found in several more recent books.<sup>6</sup>

These Bible students stressed what has been said repeatedly in this book: the Bible was written by Hebrews, who looked at things differently from ourselves. They certainly did not write history in quite the same way as western historians. They knew what they meant, and so did their original readers, but we can easily reach wrong conclusions if we read Hebrew history wearing European spectacles.

For example, when Hebrew writers gave a genealogy (that is, a family tree) they would sometimes-perhaps quite often-skip a generation or two. In Matthew's account of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, it says that "Joram begat Uzziah".<sup>7</sup> Yet Joram was actually the great-great-grandfather of Uzziah, as the Old Testament shows. Matthew deliberately skips over a very black period in Jewish history.

In the same passage Matthew says there were fourteen generations from the carrying away into Babylon to Christ.<sup>8</sup> Yet, as we would count generations, there are only thirteen in Matthew's

list.<sup>9</sup> There are, however, fourteen names; perhaps Matthew reached his total by counting both Mary, the mother, and Joseph, the step-father, of Jesus.

Thus when Matthew speaks of “generations” he evidently means, “*officially reckonable* generations”—not actual generations, as we would regard them. Those men whose names were worthy of inclusion went in; those whose names were deemed unsuitable were left out. Sometimes the reason for these omissions is apparent, sometimes not.

The Book of Ezra provides us with another example. In quoting his own genealogy, Ezra lists sixteen generations between himself and Aaron.<sup>10</sup> This covers a period of about a thousand years. Obviously Ezra, too, is concerned only with the “officially reckonable” names.

Thus we must not regard a Biblical genealogy as a complete record, but as a highly selective one. We can sometimes learn lessons by noting what is left out, and what is kept in.

There are signs that the genealogies in the early part of Genesis are selective, too. Genesis says: “Arphaxad lived five and thirty years, and begat (the father of) Sala.”<sup>11</sup> The words in brackets are not in Genesis, but they appear to bring out the literal truth of the situation. For we learn from the New Testament that Arphaxad was the *grandfather* of Sala.<sup>12</sup>

Evidently Cainan, the father of Sala, was not fit to be included in the “reckonable genealogy”. This would explain why his name was left out of the Hebrew text of Genesis, although the Jews knew of his existence, because they included him in their Greek translation of Genesis. How many other generations are missed out of the early chapters of the Old Testament? We have no way of telling.

This is not the only problem in trying to “date” Adam. The Hebrews had a habit of listing the most important son in a family first, not the eldest.

For example, Genesis says that, “Terah lived seventy years and begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran.”<sup>13</sup> But by comparing several Bible passages<sup>14</sup> and doing a little arithmetic, we discover that Terah was at least 130 when Abram was born. So the passage quoted above apparently means: “Terah lived seventy years and begat the first of his sons, of whom Abram (though not the first) is the most important.”

Similar reasoning<sup>15</sup> leads to the conclusion that Genesis ii, verse 10, quotes the age of Shem when his eldest son was born, but gives the name of the *most important* son, instead of the (presumably unworthy) eldest son.

Consequently we cannot possibly date the Flood, or the Garden of Eden, from genealogies in Genesis. They were not given us for this purpose. The Biblical evidence shows that they were typical Hebrew genealogies, not exhaustive lists like those a European historian would compile.

They give only the names of the “reckonable” men. Instead of naming the literal firstborn sons, they name the “reckonable” firstborn.<sup>16</sup> We can learn moral lessons from this sort of genealogy; that is why the Hebrews kept them. But one thing we cannot do is to build up a calendar of early Old Testament history.

So now we can answer the question: how long ago was Adam? The answer is that we do not know. The Bible does not tell us.

## How Good is Modern Anthropology”?

Anthropology is the name of a branch of science. It is concerned with the study of Man. The branch of it which is concerned with prehistoric Man is called palaeoanthropology. This is the branch we are concerned with here. To avoid using such an awful mouthful writers often just call it anthropology.

Most anthropologists put on a charming front when *they* face the general public. To read their popular books you would think they knew a great deal about the origins of mankind.

But if you go behind the scenes and see what they say to each other, a very different picture emerges. An eminent anthropologist, F. Bordes, the Professor of Pleistocene Geology and Prehistory at Bordeaux University in France, published a long letter in a scientific journal in 1969.

Here are a few extracts.

“If some of them [English and American anthropologists] consider the European thought to be ‘musty’, we Europeans consider their theories as good as science-fiction, entertaining, but not always true....

“I agree we need a sound theoretical framework, but only if it is not contrary to facts. Facts about European prehistory are the weak point of Anglo-Saxon anthropologists....

“I am rewriting my course on human palaeontology [the study of fossil Man] which will be very different from what it was last year. Now that I have seen new facts, not theories.”<sup>17</sup>

Not very encouraging reading for the student about to go to university to study anthropology. He had better choose his college carefully, to avoid being taught what another college calls “science fiction”. And whatever college he chooses, next year’s course may be entirely different from last year’s!

And this is not such an overstatement as it sounds. Modern anthropology is full of changing, controversial theories. It has to be, because our actual knowledge about ancient man is woefully incomplete. Just how incomplete it is can be seen by comparing the two pictures of *Zinjanthropus* facing page 217.

*Zinjanthropus* is the name given by Dr. L. S. B. Leakey to a fossil he found in Olduvai Gorge, Kenya. Scientists are still arguing whether he was one of our ancestors or not.

What did old Zinjan look like? A kind-hearted professor in need of a shave, as Dr. Leakey’s picture suggests? Or a savage ape on the warpath, as would appear from Dr. Oakley’s picture? Nobody knows.

The scientists seem to think that there is no harm in guessing. Neither would there be, if only they made it plain to the general public that they were guessing. Unfortunately the popular press and the broadcasting media seem to have convinced the general public that the anthropologists know most of the answers. And this is so misleading that it verges on deceit.

In fact, anthropology is about the most dubious branch of science there is. Anthropologists were warned of this not long ago by one of themselves, Dr. Bernard G. Campbell. Although accepting evolution, Dr. Campbell was clearly unhappy about the state anthropology was in.

His paper, "Science and Human Evolution", was published in *Nature*, which is one of the most important scientific journals in the world.

He declared that anthropologists have frequently behaved in a most unscientific way. Prejudice has often led them to reach false conclusions, and human vanity has also sometimes led them astray. He concluded with a stirring appeal to his fellow anthropologists to behave more scientifically in future.

Here are just a few of his pointed remarks.

"Even in other fields of scientific research the investigator is subject to a host of prejudices. . . . How much more serious this problem is in anthropological research, when man investigates himself. –

"Aberration resulting from the subjectivity of observation may be so serious as to render interpretation of fossil data of no value to science. [He illustrated this accusation by the two pictures of Zinjanthropus, reproduced in this book facing page 217.]

"An understanding and strict use of scientific method may help us to avoid some of the problems which arise in palaeoanthropology... Since improvement in method, and better presentation of observation and hypothesis are open to palaeoanthropologists, it would be the height of folly to ignore them."<sup>18</sup>

In 1972 a scientific textbook was published, called *The Origin of Homo Sapiens*. It contained papers by a number of leading anthropologists. What they wrote is so full of uncertainty that a scientist reviewing the book said:

"Perhaps it is good to have on record that we still don't know what modern man is, still less where he came from."<sup>19</sup>

## Dating the Past

Most laymen are aware that scientists have various methods of estimating the age of fossils. But they are usually unaware of the real facts about these scientific methods.

Popular science writers are largely to blame for this, because of the glib way they speak of ancient dates. The following statement is a typical example. It occurred in a popular magazine article.

"Ash deposits in Chinese caves indicate that fire had been tamed as early as 360,000 years ago."<sup>20</sup>

That figure of 360,000 years creates a completely false impression. If you asked a man, "How long is this garden?" and he replied, "About a quarter of a mile," you would know that he was only making a rough estimate. But if he replied, "360 yards," you would assume that he really knew the true length, to within a few yards.

Similarly, when popular writers quote figures like "360,000 years", the public unconsciously assumes that the date is known quite accurately. But scientists know that this is not so. Many methods of dating the remote past are in use, and ever) one of them has disadvantages.

Several of the methods make use of the traces of radioactive elements which are present in

rocks and fossils. Radioactive elements change their nature slowly, in a remarkably steady fashion. They can be likened to clocks that have been running down for some time.

By studying just how far “run down” they are, scientists can calculate how long it must be since they were first “wound up”.

Scientists using these methods, however, find that all is not plain sailing. They can never be quite sure how much radioactive material was present in the beginning. Another problem is that some foreign matter may have soaked in to contaminate the specimen. In other words, they never know whether the “clock” was “fully wound up” in the first place, or whether it has been given a few extra “winds” in the meantime.

Because of the uncertainties involved in all methods of dating, a large number of dates that were accepted a few years ago are now regarded as highly dubious. Scientific journals bristle with papers pointing out mistakes that have been made in this field.

The most popular method for estimating “recent” dates (within the past few thousand years) is called the radiocarbon method. It has taken many years of research to develop this method to a point where it can be relied upon to give accurate results.

This has been possible only because scientists were able to check their results experimentally, on objects whose age was known for certain. For example, historical records tell us that the volcano, Vesuvius, erupted suddenly in A.D. 79 and buried two Roman cities, Pompeii and Herculaneum. Consequently we know the exact age of the food left on the tables in those buried cities.

By checking their answers on such objects, radiocarbon workers were able to tell where they had gone wrong. And they often did go wrong. As recently as 1965 two experts in this field could write:

“Most laboratories are in agreement that, wherever possible, bone should not be used for radiocarbon dating.... In conclusion, it can be seen that the majority of radiocarbon dates on bone are in error.”<sup>21</sup>

For technical reasons the radiocarbon method cannot be applied to very ancient objects. The present limit of its usefulness is a very few tens of thousands of years. Beyond that, we are forced to rely on other methods that have not been developed to the same pitch of accuracy as the radiocarbon method.

Moreover, we can only check the accuracy of methods of dating the past over a limited period. Beyond about 3,000 years ago there are no objects whose age is known with anything like certainty. Beyond about 5,000 years ago all we can do is to check one method of estimating with another, and hope for the best.

Scientists are all well aware of these reasons for treating very ancient dates as only rough estimates. But there is a much more serious objection to relying on these ancient dates, which many scientists deliberately ignore.

Every method depends upon what is called “the principle of uniformitarianism”. In simple terms, “uniformity” means assuming that the same conditions have existed and the same natural laws have operated all along. In other words, that the atomic “clocks”, and the geological

“clocks”, have always ticked away at the same steady rate.

This amounts to an assumption that God does not exist, or at least that He has left the world alone. *It is obvious that if the Creator has been at work there has not been “uniformity”, and that all scientific methods of dating the remote past are based upon a false foundation.*

This means that many scientists are making an elementary mistake. They begin by assuming “uniformity”, and hence by assuming that the Creator has not been at work. From this assumption they work out a method of dating very ancient fossils. Then they use these dates as part of an argument to “prove” that Genesis is wrong, and that there has been no Creator at work.

Thus they go right round in a circle, and end up where they started. They have to start by assuming “no creative activity”, in order to end up by concluding “no Creator acting”.

### **Closing the Gap**

We have now noted two very important facts. First, the Bible does not give us enough information to enable us to say when Adam lived. Secondly, there is so much guesswork involved in anthropology that the conclusions drawn by anthropologists must be treated with great caution.

These two facts help to close the gap between the Bible and scientific knowledge.

If Adam really lived as much as ten or twelve thousand years ago, this would place him before the earliest civilisations known to archaeology. The history of fully civilised man did not begin until much later. When the uncertainties attached to scientific methods of estimating ancient dates are allowed for, there is no difficulty in regarding even the half-civilised men of the Neolithic period (the New Stone Age) as the descendants of Adam.

But what about early prehistoric man? Scientists may not have a clue what *Zinjanthropus* really looked like, but it is difficult to deny that the hairy gentleman may have lived long before Adam.

The real question, however, is not whether Zinji and all the other early prehistoric “men” existed before Adam, but *whether they were men in the Biblical sense of the word.*

A great deal of confusion has occurred because people have not realised that the word “man” has been defined in two different ways. Anthropologists define it in one way, the Bible in another.

Dr. Leakey, the discoverer of our old friend Zinji, has said that anthropologists define man like this:

“To qualify as man there must be reasonably good evidence suggesting that the creature probably made tools to a set and regular pattern.”<sup>22</sup>

Notice those cautious words, “reasonably good evidence”, “suggesting”, and “probably”. The classification is evidently based upon what the scientist *thinks*, not what he *knows*. He defines as man any creature that he thinks used tools.

Now compare with this the Bible's definition: "So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him."<sup>23</sup>

In this one verse the Bible gives its definition of man twice over, because it is such an important definition. Man is a creature in God's own image.

It is clear from the way the New Testament quotes this verse that the word "image" refers to God's moral character, rather than His physical shape.<sup>24</sup>

In modern English, therefore, the Bible's definition of man amounts to this: *man is a creature capable of serving God.*

The difference between these two definitions is most important. When anthropologists speak of man, and when the Bible speaks of man, they are not necessarily speaking of the same thing.

The ability to make crude tools, or even to light fires and cook food, is evidence of intelligence. But it is not evidence of the ability to serve God. And this-not mere brain power-is what distinguishes man from the lesser animals, according to the Bible.

There is no proof that early prehistoric "man" had this ability to serve God. Consequently he can be regarded, from the Biblical standpoint, as merely a highly intelligent animal.

Moreover, there is no proof that the human race is descended from any of these early prehistoric "men". Anthropologists assert that we are descended from some of these prehistoric "men", which they classify under "*Homo sapiens*" (a term which includes ourselves) and earlier species of *Homo*.

But we must remember that this is only an opinion. And anthropologists' opinions are constantly changing. Not so long ago they thought we were descended from a shaggy creature they called "Neanderthal man". Then they came to regard "Neanderthal man" as an evolutionary dead-end, an extinct creature with no direct links to the human race.

And that is how a large number of Bible-believing scientists regard early prehistoric "man" in general: as a collection of intelligent two-legged animals, long since extinct. This view has recently received powerful support from an unexpected quarter, by the discovery that there are tool-using animals alive today. Dr. Jane Goodall has found that chimpanzees in the wild state regularly use simple tools.<sup>25</sup>

Some of the views about prehistoric "man" expressed in this chapter may not agree with current scientific *opinions*. But they do not clash with any known scientific *facts*. And they do not disagree with anything the Bible tells us, either.

The Bible's teaching about the origin of mankind is beautiful in its simplicity. By a special creative act God made the first man and woman, after He had made all the rest of creation. From these two the whole human race is descended.

This explanation satisfied men and women three thousand years ago. It is still eminently sensible today. It can stand up to the critical scrutiny of our scientific age.

How can this be? Every other ancient account of creation and the origin of life reads like childish nonsense in the modern world. Why is the Bible so different?

There is an obvious answer.

The Bible is the inspired Word of God.

## ***The Problem of Suffering***

If there is a loving God, why does He stand back and do nothing while the world is full of suffering?

This is a very big problem to many people. Some of them say they will never be able to believe in God or the Bible until they find an answer to this question.

I know how they feel about it. The problem of suffering used to worry me too at one time. But that was before I knew Marjorie.

When I first met her she had spent the previous five years of her life in one small room, on the top floor of a dismal tenement block in a northern city. Laid low by a painful and crippling ailment, she hardly ever moved outside her tiny home. But although she is never wholly free from pain, Marjorie is one of the few people who never wonder why God allows suffering. Her constant companion is the Bible; and she helped me to see that the Bible holds the key to the problem of suffering.

The solution is not a simple one. It is bound up with the whole history of the human race. Part of the answer lies in the distant past. Another part belongs to the present day. And part of it is concerned with the future, with the world of tomorrow.

After we have looked at each of these three aspects-the past, the present and the future-we shall, like Marjorie, begin to understand why people have to suffer.

### **Long Ago**

The story of human suffering begins in the Garden of Eden. As we saw in the previous chapter, there is good reason to believe that Adam and Eve were real people, although they must have lived a very long time ago. There is only one way to understand their story. Take a Bible and read the first three chapters of Genesis for yourself.

It may surprise you to discover that some common beliefs about the Garden of Eden are not in the Bible at all. For instance, you will find that man's first sin was not connected with an apple, and had nothing to do with sex.

Instead, you will find a simple account of how the first man was given freedom of action, and a chance to use his freedom wisely. He lived in a world described as "very good", and he had the chance to live a very pleasant life. But poor Adam misused his opportunity: he chose to disobey God. Through this choice he started a sort of habit, the habit of sinning, which has gripped the human race like a python ever since.

Their Maker told the first human pair that two tragic consequences would follow from their sin. First, that they and their children would experience "sorrow"-which in modern English we would call "suffering".<sup>1</sup> And secondly, that they must suffer death-the greatest and most final form of suffering there is.<sup>2</sup>

So Genesis tells us how suffering came into the world, when the first man chose to disobey God. Because we are Adam's children we inherit his sinful tendencies. And so we too must

suffer, and we too must die.

But this only leads to another question. Since God is infinitely wise, He must have known from the beginning what was going to happen. Why then did He give mankind so much freedom in the first place? Why did He not make us so that we could not possibly sin? Why doesn't God stop us from doing harm, and making each other suffer? There is a surprisingly simple answer to this. The Bible tells us that "God is love".<sup>3</sup> Because of this, love matters more than anything else in the world. God's main aim in creating men and women was to let them enjoy His love, and to give them the opportunity to return it.

For this reason God simply had to provide us with what is usually called a free will. For by its very nature, *love is a voluntary thing*. Even God's almighty power cannot *make* men and women love Him.

If this puzzles you, think of the classic picture of the caveman. He provides an example of what power can and cannot do. The caveman can seize his bride by the hair and drag her away captive. He can compel her to stay and be his wife. But he cannot force her to love him.

Many of us will know from our own experience that it is worse than useless to try and compel people to love us. Unless it comes freely and willingly, there can be no such thing as love. And God Himself is a God of love.

So God did not want a race of man-sized puppets dancing on strings. He wanted people who would really love Him, of their own choice. So He gave us free will.

But instead of choosing to love, we choose, all too often, to act selfishly. "If ye love Me, ye will keep My commandments", said Jesus.<sup>4</sup> Every time we break one of God's commandments, we show that in our hearts we do not love Him as we ought. And by giving way to the hatred in their hearts, many men inflict terrible trouble upon their fellows.

Many people forget this when they talk as if God were responsible for all the suffering in the world. God certainly created illnesses and death. But it was human fiendishness that invented the rack and the lash, the concentration camp and the gas chamber, the flamethrower and the hydrogen bomb. It is humiliating, but essential, to remember how much suffering in the world is man-made.

It was tragic that our race chose the path of disobedience, the way of hatred instead of the way of love. But God was prepared for this. The Book of Genesis reveals that He was ready with a plan to bring great good Out of the disaster in Eden. And in this plan, suffering plays a very important part.

God began by sentencing the whole sinful race to death. Not to immediate death, though; He allows us to live a while, before we suffer the just penalty of sin. This is really a great act of mercy on God's part. Every single day we live is an unearned, undeserved, gift from God.

But His mercy does not stop there. God went further, and provided a way of reconciliation, so that those people who really want to love Him might learn to do so.

Later chapters of the Bible fill in the details of God's way of life and love. "Learn to love and obey Me," He said, in effect, "and you shall be raised from the dead to live for ever."

## **The Reason for Death**

Every engineering works has an inspection department. Here the manufactured parts are tested, to see if they measure up to the specification. Those that fail are classed as scrap and find their way back to the smelting furnace, where they finally cease to exist.

The Bible shows that death serves the same sort of purpose for human “rejects”. Those that fail to meet God’s requirements will be sentenced to eternal death-which simply means that they will cease to exist. When machine parts are found to be no use, they are destroyed; and when men and women have finally shown that they are no use to God, He will blot them out of existence too.

This simple, sensible, teaching is found throughout Scripture. Here are three examples:

“The Lord preserveth all them that love Him, but all the wicked will He destroy.”<sup>5</sup>

“Whoso despiseth the Word (of God) shall be destroyed.”<sup>6</sup>

“Them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ; who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord.”<sup>7</sup>

These passages are clear and straightforward. But there is a complication that must be faced. A number of other Bible passages speak of the punishment of the wicked in a different way. They say the wicked will be punished for ever in hell.

These other passages create two problems. First, they appear to contradict the passages quoted above. If the wicked are going to suffer for ever in hell, why do quite a lot of Bible passages say the wicked will be destroyed? If you are wiped out of existence, you obviously cannot go on suffering.

Secondly, the idea of *everlasting* suffering makes it impossible to answer the question with which this chapter began: if God is love, why does He let people suffer? The problem of temporary suffering can perhaps be explained; every surgeon creates temporary suffering for the best of reasons. But everlasting suffering would pose an everlasting problem.

Happily, evangelical Christians today can see the way out of this dilemma. The latest edition of the Inter-Varsity Fellowship’s *New Bible Commentary* refers to a verse that resolves our problem:

“Jesus said) And fear not them which kill the body but are not able to kill the soul. But rather fear Him which is able *to destroy both soul and body in hell.*”<sup>8</sup>

The commentator says:

“Him who can destroy both soul and body in hell must refer to God, rather than to Satan. The soul in Biblical thought is not immortal, except when new life is conferred upon it through Christ (1 Timothy 6:16; 2 Timothy 1:10). *Hell is therefore the place of its destruction as Gehenna, the valley of Hinnom, was of the rubbish of Jerusalem.*”<sup>9</sup> (The italics are mine.)

The commentator is right. The punishment of hell actually is destruction. It is called an “everlasting punishment” because the destruction, once it has taken place, will never be reversed. This explains why the New Testament phrase for “hell-fire” is actually “Gehenna-fire”. Gehenna was the place outside Jerusalem where the city’s unwanted rubbish was burnt up-not a place where people were tortured.

In recognising these facts about hell, modern Bible-believers are not inventing a new idea.

They are merely returning to the original principles of the Reformation. Tyndale, the great Bible translator, has left it on record that this was how he understood the Greek "Gehenna", or the English "hell".<sup>10</sup> Martin Luther also at one time expressed similar views.<sup>11</sup>

### **The World We Live in**

We have seen the reason for death, and we have seen that a large part of the world's suffering is man-made. But this still leaves a great deal of suffering for which God is undoubtedly responsible. It is necessary now to look at the present-day world with Bible in hand, to find a reason for this.

In essence, this is what we find. Suffering actually serves an extremely useful purpose. Surprising though this may seem, the world would be worse off, not better off, if there were no suffering in it.

The truth of this statement is most obvious in connection with pain. Pain is not the only form of suffering, but it is probably the most unpleasant. And it is not too difficult to see that pain is really very useful to mankind.

The story of a nine-year-old American boy demonstrates this. George's mother brought him to the famous Johns Hopkins medical school in Baltimore, one November day in 1937. In most respects he was a normal healthy boy, with more than average intelligence. But in one particular way he was different from any boy that you are ever likely to meet: he had been born without any sense of pain whatever.

It is tempting to think that George was a very lucky lad, and to wonder why, if God could make one boy entirely free from pain, He could not make the rest of the world like it too. But wait. There is another side to the story. "Scars were found on almost every part of the body," the examining doctor wrote in his report.

One enormous scar stretched right across his buttocks, where George had once sat on a heater, and, because he felt nothing, had not moved until his flesh was burnt almost to the bone. He was partly blind in one eye because sand had one day worked its way in, and George had never noticed it until permanent damage had been done. His left foot was permanently deformed, as he had broken a bone and then walked about on it for months before the damage was spotted by his parents. Both hands had been so badly cut that he would never again be able to straighten his fingers. Pain acts as a danger signal for the rest of us, but poor little George had nothing to warn him when his body was being injured.

Whom would you rather have for a son? A normal boy, who hurts himself, and cries, and gets over it-and takes more care next time? Or a carefree little George, with his total freedom from pain-and his multiple deformities?

### **Developing Character**

George's story shows that pain is necessary if a child's body is to develop into that of a normal, healthy adult. But God is even more concerned with the growth of people's characters than He is with their bodies. And suffering also plays an important part in the development of character.

Needless to say, this does not mean that every time you have toothache you grow a little more virtuous. It would obviously be wrong to think that the best people in the world are those who have suffered the most. In the language of science, there is not a one-to-one correspondence between suffering and character.

Nevertheless there is a very important connection between them. *Strong characters can only be developed in a world where suffering is always present.* If there were no such thing as suffering, there would also be no such things as courage, or compassion. If nobody ever fell among thieves, there would be no Good Samaritans in the world.

Men who have suffered greatly are sometimes the first to recognise that this is true.

Paul, the apostle, was such a man. A mob once set upon him, stoned him, and left him for dead.<sup>12</sup> He survived this terrible ordeal, and not long afterwards he returned to the very town where it had happened. There he told the disciples, "We must through much tribulation enter into the Kingdom of God."<sup>13</sup>

Paul obviously knew what he was talking about when he spoke of tribulation. Yet perhaps the very fact that he was a Bible character makes him seem rather remote. It is hard for us to realise that these are the words of a real human being like ourselves.

But there is no such difficulty about the woman I mentioned at the start of this chapter. Marjorie is a British citizen, still very much alive today. One day, while lying on her sickbed, she startled me by remarking, "Do you know, I often thank God for treating me like this!"

I asked her what she meant and in reply she told me a little about her past. "Twenty years ago I was a typical, healthy young girl. I was too busy enjoying life to have any time for God. Besides, I felt that I had no need of Him. I could get along quite well on my own.

"Then came the day when God decided to show me whether I needed Him or not. He put me here, on my back. For a few years I was miserable. All the joy had gone out of my life and I could see no point in going on living.

"That's how I was when a woman came to see me, with a Bible in her handbag. In the old days, when people talked about religion I used to shut my ears. But this time I was prepared to listen. And so I came to hear about the offer of a place in God's Everlasting Kingdom."

Marjorie raised herself up a little in her bed, and spoke with great emphasis.

"Now I know that these are the best days of my life. If you offered to take me out of this bed, free me from pain, and put me back where I was twenty years ago, I just wouldn't thank you. Without this pain, I should never have come to accept God's Way of Life. He knew that I needed this illness, and so I can only thank Him for the way that He has shaped my life."

### **The Sufferings of the Innocent**

It is easy to see a reason for Marjorie's sufferings. But there are many people whose sufferings appear to serve no useful purpose at all. The native in the Amazon jungle who has never heard of Jesus Christ, but is bitten by an alligator and dies after weeks of agony; the baby in an English village who dies when his pram is crushed by a falling tree. They are not being prepared for God's Everlasting Kingdom by their sufferings, so why, we may wonder, does God let them suffer?

One way to answer that question is to ask another one. If God did decide to protect such people from suffering and to allow nobody but Christians to suffer, what would the result be? Can you imagine anybody ever becoming a Christian in such circumstances? Obviously a system like that would never work.

So God has adopted a more practical scheme. He has created a world subject to certain natural laws, where a measure of suffering is bound to come to everyone, sooner or later. We live in a world where, as the Bible expresses it:

“Time and chance happeneth to them all... so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them.”<sup>14</sup>

The problem of suffering is most likely to worry us when we ourselves are in great distress. At such times a comforting Bible passage is Hebrews 12:1-13. It is too long to reproduce here but it is worth reading, several times over, in your own Bible. It hinges about verse 3 which says:

“Consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.”

This tells us that whenever we feel sorry for ourselves we should think about Jesus. He suffered dreadfully-very much more than most of us are ever likely to suffer. And He was as innocent as a new-born babe. Yet He accepted His agony without complaining. He knew there was a good reason for it. As it says a little earlier in the same book, He “learned obedience by the things which He suffered”.<sup>15</sup>

If only we can accept this advice and think about Jesus, we shall find our own troubles much easier to bear. Many people say in their distress, “But why should all this happen to me? I have never done anyone any harm. I am not a wicked person. Why should I have to suffer so much, while the wicked get off Scot free?”

Yet Jesus, the only man in all history who might have been excused for talking like that, never did so. Jesus Christ, alone among mankind, could truly have said, “I have never done any harm.” But He never once asked, “Why should all this happen to Me?” “Consider Him,” the Bible advises. If we think of how the righteous Jesus was willing to accept such terrible suffering, we are much less likely to feel indignant about our own hardships.

### Summing Up

Before we start to look at the future it will be useful to take stock. We have learnt from considering the past and the present world that:

- (1) God gave man free will, so that he would have the opportunity to love.
- (2) But man chose hatred rather than love, thus bringing suffering into the world.
- (3) Death and hell put an end to both sin and suffering. This is God's way of wiping out of existence those who do not choose to love Him.
- (4) But there is a hope of life after death for those who do try to love God.
- (5) A very useful purpose is served by pain. Without it we could not develop healthy bodies.
- (6) In much the same way, suffering is of value to us. We could never develop strong characters fit for eternal life if this world were free from suffering.
- (7) Our own sufferings become much easier to bear if we think about some other person's-

especially those of Jesus.

### **The World to Come**

A man and a boy were walking past a building site. Young Johnny looked at it with a puzzled expression, then turned to his father.

*"Look, Dad, is that the new town hall going up there?"*

"Yes, that's it my boy."

"Well I don't think much of it. What a mess!" He pointed to the piles of sand, heaps of bricks, concrete mixers, reinforcing *wire and wheelbarrows all mixed up together*. *"And look at that ugly scaffolding all over the outside. I think the man in charge doesn't know his*

*"You're in too much of a hurry," his father chuckled. "You must wait until next year before you decide whether the architect is any good. That ugly stuff will have done its job by then, and will be cleared away. You can't judge the building until it is finished."*

*"But surely, Dad, there must be some way of seeing what the finished building will look like?"*

"Yes, son, there is, but you won't be able to see it here. You'll need to go down High Street to the public library. There's a large picture hanging on the wall there, labelled, 'Artist's Impression of the New Town Hall'. That will give you a pretty good idea of what's coming."

Johnny is like the people who cannot imagine why God allows so much suffering in the world. They fail to realise that pain and death are like the scaffolding and the ugly piles of building materials. These things are only temporary. They are here until their purpose has been served, and then God will do away with them.

Our Bible explains that God is planning a glorious future for the world. It provides a kind of "Artist's Impression" of what this world will be like when God has finished developing it. It tells how Jesus is coming back again, to judge the living and the dead, and to set up God's Everlasting Kingdom. The faithful followers of Jesus will enjoy everlasting life in that Kingdom, serving Him for ever in a perfect world.

For the time being suffering is needed in the world, whilst God is building the characters of those men and women who want to live for ever. But when enough characters of the right type have been formed, there will be no more need of suffering. Eventually God's plan of redemption will be complete; then there will be no more pain, no more suffering, no more sin, and no more death.

At that time, when all these temporary things have been cleared away, there will be no doubt that the Architect of the Universe has been building wisely.

### **Marjorie Chooses a Chapter**

At the time when I first met her, Marjorie was never free from pain. But on some days she suffered more than others. Once I called to see her on one of her off days, and she was obviously relieved when I said that I would not stop long.

"But before you go," she asked, "would you read my favourite chapter for me?"

When I asked her what it was, she replied, "Isaiah 35." "I might have known," I said to myself as I found the place in my Bible, "that it would be a chapter about the world to come."

Marjorie listened expectantly as I began to read.

"Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart 'Be strong, fear not; behold your God will come ... and save you.'

"Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped.

Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing; for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert . .

"The redeemed shall walk there, and the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads.

"They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."

She wished me Godspeed, and I walked slowly down three flights of echoing stone stairs to the street. I thought of the woman lying upstairs with her pain and her Bible. She was stronger now than when I had gone in. While I had been reading to her a tranquil expression had lit up her face. The furrows of constant pain were less noticeable when I left. Marjorie was thinking of the dawn of God's new age, and she was well content.

### **Three Men Suffered on Calvary**

Three crosses stood on the hill of Calvary. Three men hung there, dying. In the centre the Lord Jesus Christ; on either side a condemned thief.

These three were face to face with the problem of suffering in its most intense form-death by torture. It was too much for the two thieves. They began to curse Jesus.

Nowadays when people are in trouble they are liable to say, "If there really is a God, why doesn't He put a stop to all the suffering in the world?" At Calvary the thieves said something very similar:

"If you really are Christ, then save yourself and us too!"<sup>16</sup>

At last one of the thieves became silent. He turned and rebuked the other thief, who was still cursing Jesus.

"Have you no fear of God? You are under the same sentence as He. For us it is plain justice. We are paying the price of our misdeeds. But this man has done nothing wrong."<sup>17</sup>

He then turned to Jesus and pleaded, "Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy Kingdom."

And Jesus promised to do so.<sup>18</sup>

Those two thieves were two real people. But they also form a kind of parable of the whole human race. All of us are represented there, on Calvary. Like the two thieves we are all suffering, dying people, and, as the thief said, "For us it is plain justice." We are all condemned sinners, who deserve to die.

Just like the two thieves, we all start off as God's enemies. The problem of suffering is too much for us in our early years, as it was for the thieves. We think that God has been unfair to us,

and complain about our pains.

After a while the problem of suffering sorts us into two different groups, just as it distinguished between the two thieves.

The first thief stands for those who never learn any better. Such people go through life asking, "Why doesn't God deliver me from my suffering?" They die in their ignorance like the first thief, with no promise of a future life.

The other thief represents all those who come to accept the problem of suffering, and its answer in Jesus Christ. They come to recognise that God knows best; that He is wise and just and loving in the way He directs our lives. Like the wise thief they learn that this present world of suffering is only temporary, a training ground for the Kingdom to come. They cease to be wrapped up in their present troubles, and concentrate on asking, "Thy Kingdom come. Remember me when Thou comest!"

Death is still an enemy, even to these people. But it is no longer a conqueror. They can face death unflinchingly, with the promise of a place in God's Everlasting Kingdom ringing in their ears. They are the people referred to in this New Testament vision of the age to come:

"These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.

"They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters.

"And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."<sup>19</sup>

### ***The Real Problems***

The great detective looked at his friend Watson.

“Circumstantial evidence is a very tricky thing; it may seem to point very straight to one thing, but if you shift your own point of view a little, you may find it pointing in an equally uncompromising manner to something entirely different.”<sup>1</sup>

Sherlock Holmes was right. Circumstantial evidence really is a tricky thing. So much depends on the way you look at it.

Many millions of people regard the circumstantial evidence against the Bible as damning. But almost all of them have taken a very one-sided view of it.

In this book I have tried to look at this evidence from another point of view. You know now—perhaps for the first time—nearly all the things that can be said against the Bible. But does the Bible appear any the worse for this?

You will remember how, in Part One, we saw a great deal of positive evidence that the Bible is a superhuman book. That evidence has never been properly answered by the Bible's enemies. They may try to shrug it off, but they cannot dispose of it.

Thus we started Part Two in a position of strength. We knew of many good reasons to believe that the Bible is true. We were going to keep those in the backs of our minds as we started to look at the case against the Bible.

In Chapter 12 we noted that difficulties were bound to exist. There are unsolved problems in every area of human knowledge. We can hardly expect the Word of the Almighty to be so simple that every question can be answered.

Chapter 13 debunked those twentieth-century idols, the Experts. We cannot do without experts; our modern civilisation depends upon them. (I earn my own living as a specialist in one narrow field of science and technology.) Experts are usually right on questions of fact. But they are often hopelessly wrong in their opinions. And yet they have somehow managed to bluff the general public into accepting their opinions as practically unquestionable.

Chapter 14 showed that there can be no half measures about the Bible. It claims to contain the very words of God. We cannot water down this claim and accept only the bits we like. There are overwhelming reasons for accepting the whole Bible as an inspired message from the Lord.

We saw the disastrous effects of trying to compromise, in Chapter 15. First you reject just a little here and a little there. Gradually you whittle away at the Bible until you have nothing left. Then comes the moral landslide. The present sorry state of our “Christian civilisation” is the direct result of its leaders' glib rejection of the Bible.

In Chapter 16 we looked at the question of authorship. Some scholars consider that the Old Testament was written by the men whose names it bears. But many other scholars disagree. We looked at the reasons for both points of view, and found that modern criticisms of the Old Testament are based more on guesswork than on facts. In the New Testament we saw that there

was a far greater supply of solid evidence; and this evidence strongly favours the traditional views about the authors of the New Testament.

Chapter 17 told the astonishing story of how the Bible has come down to us, across a gap of nineteen centuries or more. We saw strong evidence for the Bible's claim that each book was recognised as "Scripture" as soon as it was written, and for ever after was preserved as such. We marvelled at the accuracy of the ancient scribes who copied it by hand. We admired the efforts of hundreds of scholars to give us the best possible translation into our mother tongue. And we saw that there is no need to worry about the problem of interpretation -so long as we are prepared to read the Bible for ourselves.

We saw in Chapter 18 that the Bible as a history book is second to none. Again and again new finds by archaeologists have proved it right, where once it was accused of being wrong. We saw that there is no real reason to reject its claim to be absolutely right, always.

So-called contradictions in the Bible were examined in Chapter 19. We saw that everyday life is full of things that look like contradictions, but which, when you know all the facts, are nothing of the kind. We found reassuring evidence that no *real* contradictions have ever been proved to exist in the Bible.

In Chapter 20 we looked at the slanderous things that are said about the Bible. We saw that it was neither indecent, nor bloodthirsty, nor unreliable, nor unfair-but just misrepresented by its critics.

Chapter 21 was the first of a series of chapters about the impact of modern science. We saw that it was more logical to believe in the miracle stories of the Bible than to reject them. And we saw that scientists themselves can't explain the existence of the universe with-out talking of "creation".

Then we saw in Chapter 22 that it takes more faith to believe that evolution could have occurred without a Creative Power behind it than to believe the Book of Genesis.

Chapter 23 showed that the shakiest part of this shaky theory is that which deals with the evolution of man. We saw that Adam and Eve were real people; that they were specially created by God as the ancestors of the whole human race; and that we are not told how long ago they lived. We saw no clash between Bible-believing Christianity and anthropology-once the misconceptions on both sides were stripped away.

Finally, in Chapter 24 we saw that the existence of suffering is no reason for disbelief. Far from it: the Bible's own explanation of the reason for suffering is so convincing that it provides another powerful reason for belief

### **Then Why Do Men Disbelieve?**

We have looked at the evidence on both sides.

We saw that the evidence for a God-given Bible is impressive. We saw that the evidence against the Bible is nothing like as weighty as its opponents suppose.

And yet most people disbelieve.

Why?

Have they weighed the evidence, and found it wanting? Or is there some other reason?

Yes, there is. There are several other reasons, in fact. It is not difficult to recognise the

following six factors as the major causes of twentieth-century unbelief.

*(1) Sensitivity*

Once I was involved in a minor car accident. It was all my own fault. I said as much to the panel beater who was straightening out my dented wing.

“Lumme, guv’nor,” he said, “you’re the first bloke what’s been in here this year who hasn’t been in the right!”

I could well believe him. Motorists never like to admit that they are in the wrong. But motorists are not a special class of people. They are just ordinary human beings. And the sad fact is that none of us likes to be told off; we all hate facing up to our shortcomings. Hence the unpopularity of the Bible, which tells us fairly and squarely what God thinks of the way we behave.

A missionary once gave a Bible to an educated native. A few weeks later he asked him how he had enjoyed reading it.

“I didn’t like it at all,” replied the native. “That book knows too much about me! It is like a second conscience.”

The truth often hurts. The things that the Bible tells us about ourselves are particularly painful. To admit that they are true is as unpleasant as admitting that the other fellow in a road accident was in the right. Our natural instinct is to defend ourselves against the Bible’s criticisms. And the easiest way to do this is by convincing ourselves that the Bible is not true.

*(2) Prosperity*

In 1969 Mr. Charles Holme moved away from an old farmhouse in Staffordshire to a smart new bungalow. When he moved he disposed of some of his furniture, including an old painting that had once belonged to his father. He thought it was a dull old picture that wouldn’t suit his bright new home. So he accepted £4 for it.

Two years later he had the shock of his life, when he recognised the picture on a TV programme. Someone had spotted it in a London junk shop and identified it as a genuine Van Gogh. It had just fetched £46,000 at a sale in New York.<sup>2</sup>

Poor Mr. Holme! He had so many attractive things in his new bungalow that he had no room for a “dull old picture”. And so he lost a fortune which passed to someone else.

We must not laugh at Mr. Holme’s misfortune. His story is a parable of our time. We have all been spoilt by the abundance of nice bright things in our lives. We have been so dazzled by them that we cannot recognise true riches when we see them. We have no room for a “dull old book” in our way of life. So like Mr. Holme, and like the Biblical character Esau,<sup>3</sup> we settle for short-term happiness and miss the opportunity of untold riches.

*(3) Security*

Bibles are scarcer than diamonds in Russia today. A friend of mine has a young son who tried to smuggle a load of Russian Bibles to a church in Leningrad. Unfortunately his suitcase was searched at the Russian customs, and his precious cargo was discovered. The Bibles were confiscated while he was fined heavily and deported. Undeterred, he asked his accusers a searching question:

“Why are you making such a fuss? Why should the mighty Soviet Union be afraid of this little book?”

He was not surprised that they ignored his query. But he knew the answer. Bible-believing Christians do not make enthusiastic supporters of Russia's atheistic rulers. So the men in the Kremlin regard the Bible as a threat to their security, and suppress it.

Although we may not realise it, many of us feel the same way about the Bible, deep down. If we were to let the Bible rule in our hearts, most of us would have to change our whole way of life. We cannot tolerate such a threat to our peace of mind. We want to remain securely entrenched in our present way of living. So we suppress the Bible in the only way open to us-by convincing ourselves that it is untrue.

#### (4) *Conformity*

Through an administrative mistake a perfectly healthy little boy was sent to a school for handicapped children. As the one normal boy in a crowd of cripples he felt dreadfully uncomfortable. But within a week he had solved his problem. He taught himself to walk with a very convincing limp. Nothing would convince him that his healthy condition was "right", and that of everybody else was "wrong".

The desire to conform is deep-rooted in every one of us. Jellyfish always go along with the tide; it takes a fish with a backbone to swim against it. The argument, "But hardly anybody believes that sort of stuff today!" has no logical force at all. Yet psychologically it is tremendously powerful.

There is only one way to resist that sort of argument. Remember that all through history men have been led astray by it. Within living memory hardly anybody believed that it would ever be possible for man to travel faster than sound. An early nineteenth-century professor, Dionysius Lardner, told the Dublin Royal Society that "men might as well expect to walk on the moon as cross the North Atlantic in one of those steamboats!" The world agreed with him. Hardly anybody thought that man would ever do either.

On the day that Jesus Christ was crucified, hardly anybody thought that the world would ever hear any more of Him. Most people thought He was finished. How wrong they were!

Yet human beings go on reacting in the same old way. Most people reject the Bible just because most other people reject the Bible, and they can't bear to be different.

#### (5) *Obstinacy*

The practical psychologist, Dale Carnegie, used to say that the only way to win an argument was to avoid it. This is only a slight overstatement of the truth. When a man once gets deeply involved in an argument, he is likely to stick to his guns whatever happens. His emotions become stirred, and after that no amount of logical evidence will move him. "I jolly well won't give in!" he says to himself, in effect.

The behaviour of a man called Hiel is typical of this attitude. The story begins some thirteen or fourteen centuries before Christ, when Joshua destroyed the city of Jericho. He forbade anyone to rebuild it, and prophesied what would happen if anyone disobeyed:

"May the Lord's curse light on the man who comes forward to rebuild this city of Jericho. The laying of its foundations shall cost him his eldest son; the setting up of its gates shall cost him his youngest."<sup>4</sup>

About 500 years went by. The Bible and the archaeological record agree that during that period Jericho lay desolate. Then along came friend Hiel. Like so many of the people around us today, he appeared to have no fear of Bible prophecy coming true. He determined to rebuild Jericho.

He laid the foundations of the city-and his eldest son, Abiram, died. It is tempting to imagine what his wife might have said to him.

“You fool! You have defied the Scripture, and Abiram is dead. Let that be a lesson to you. Stop this crazy plan before the second part of the prophecy is fulfilled, and our other son dies.”

But Hiel took no notice. Perhaps he regarded his first son's death as a coincidence. Anyway, he pressed on obstinately and at last set the gates of the city in their place. And then his second son died.<sup>5</sup> A tearful Mrs. Hiel had every justification for saying, “I told you so!”

Millions of unbelievers today act just like Hiel. They brush aside the evidence of prophecy already fulfilled, and stride on regardless of the Bible's warnings about the future. Christ commented that they will go on pursuing their own ways, right up to the day when He returns to fulfil the remaining prophecies of the Bible.<sup>6</sup> As with Hiel, their obstinate refusal to face the facts will be their undoing.

(6) *The Way We Are Made*

This is the greatest reason of all. In a way it embraces all the other reasons. Human nature has a natural rebelliousness about it, a kind of built-in opposition to everything that comes from God. He did not create us that way; we have become like it of ourselves.<sup>7</sup> The result is, in the words of Paul:

“The desires of the flesh [“flesh” is Paul's word for what we call “human nature”] are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you doing what you would.”<sup>8</sup>

This inborn perversity of human nature has operated all through history. It caused the ancient Israelites to turn against Moses, even though he had just delivered them from a life of slavery in Egypt.<sup>9</sup> It caused their descendants to disregard the words of the prophets, and persecute them.<sup>10</sup> It caused the Jews of the first century to crucify their King. And it is at the root of men's unreasonable attitude to the Bible, all through history.

**Up To Us**

Thus God gives us a word of advice. Because of the way we are made, it is difficult for us to be fair to the Bible. Recognising this fact is half the battle. If we once determine to give the Bible a fair chance, despite our instinctive dislike for it, we shall soon begin to see it in a very different light.

For one thing, the opinions of the unbelievers around us will gradually come to seem less important. We shall begin to recognise them for the blind expressions of prejudice that they are. The objections men raise against the Bible will look less and less weighty. And we shall find ourselves discovering more and more positive evidence that the Bible is true.

Part One of this book ended with a suggested prayer from Mark's Gospel, for you to pray as you studied the Bible: “Lord I (want to) believe; help Thou mine unbelief!”

Now is a good time to add to this a second prayer, drawn from Luke's Gospel: "God, be merciful to me, a sinner."<sup>11</sup>

This can be your way of recognising where you really stand. We are not in a position to set ourselves up as judges of the Bible. On the contrary, the Bible is going to judge us, one day.<sup>12</sup>

So we need to continue our studies with this sort of feeling in our hearts:

"Oh, Lord, I am beginning to see why the Bible always looked wrong. It was because there was something wrong with me. It was as if I had always looked at it through dirty, half-closed eyelashes. Now I want to look at it fairly and squarely-even though I know it is going to be painful to do so. I want to give the Bible a fair hearing, at last. Help me, Lord."

To give the Bible a fair hearing. Yes, of course, that's what we need to do. But how do we set about it?

Part Three will point the way.

## PART THREE

Now What?

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***First Steps in Bible Study***

So we are going to give the Bible a chance to speak for itself. In other words, we are going to set about reading it. Perhaps you have never read it before, at least, not since childhood. What is the best way to begin?

This is not easy, because there are several things about the Bible that tend to put off the beginner. To begin with, there is its sheer size: more than a thousand large pages. The older versions are usually bound in a forbidding black. They are written in an unfamiliar, old-fashioned style of English. Some chapters seem almost impossible to understand, even in a modern translation. Other parts are just lists of names, which are about as interesting at first glance as a page from the telephone directory.

What's that? You were about to give it up as hopeless before you had even begun? Hold on! Remember that this is the book that has transformed the lives of millions. Countless multitudes of ordinary, uneducated men and women have found it a delight to read. Large numbers of them have willingly faced martyrdom on account of it. Don't give up too easily. There must be more in this book than you think.

Cheer up. It is possible to break yourself in as a Bible reader, quite painlessly, if you use the right method. In fact you should be able to enjoy it, right from the word, "go". The three essentials are:

- (1) Choose an attractive modern translation to begin with.
- (2) Don't try to read right through from Genesis to Revelation at your first attempt. Instead, begin by concentrating on the most readable parts of the Bible.
- (3) Most important of all: use the well-tried technique of reading the Bible with a purpose in mind.

Choosing your "beginner's Bible" will not take long. It is essential to have a complete Bible, and not just a New Testament. Translations made by whole teams of scholars are obviously to be preferred to those made by one man. Protestant versions are to be preferred to Roman Catholic versions, because all Catholic translations are affected to some extent by the Catholic doctrine that the Church has the right to interpret the Bible.

This narrows the field to two modern translations, the Revised Standard Version and the New English Bible. The Revised Standard Version has the advantage that it sticks fairly closely to the meaning of the Hebrew and Greek. The New English Bible, on the other hand, is less accurate because it tends to interpret the Hebrew and Greek more freely; but many people find it more readable. Either will serve your purpose, as a Bible to begin on.

## Selected Readings

The Old Testament tells the story of God's people, from the very beginning up to about 400 B.C. Right from the very first book it foretold the coming of a Saviour-King, who would save men from sin and rule the world in righteousness.

The New Testament begins with the birth of this Saviour-King (Jesus). It goes on to tell of His life, death, resurrection, and ascension to heaven. It describes the early history of the Church that He founded, and includes a number of letters written by His followers. It ends with a vision of the future, and an oft-repeated promise that one day He will come back to the earth.

The two Testaments are like two halves of a jig-saw puzzle. It is impossible to make complete sense of one without the other. For this reason Old and New Testament readings are interspersed in the table given below.

The Gospel of Mark  
 Genesis  
 Exodus (chapters 1 to 24)  
 The Gospel of Luke  
 Joshua (chapters 1 to 10, and chapter 24), Judges and Ruth  
 The Acts of the Apostles  
 1st and 2nd Samuel  
 The Gospel of Matthew  
 1st and 2nd Kings  
 Paul's Epistles to Timothy, Titus and Philemon  
 Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther  
 The Epistles of James, Peter and John  
 Proverbs  
 Paul's Epistles to the Corinthians and the Philippians  
 Isaiah  
 The Gospel of John  
 Jonah and Malachi

At the rate of one long chapter or two short chapters a day, that list should last you about a year. By the end of that time you will have quite a good idea of what the Bible is about.

You may then be tempted to go on and read the books you have missed. My advice is: don't. First spend another year working through this selected list again. You will be surprised how much more you learn on the second time round.

## Reading with a Purpose

For a little while you may find it hard to stick to your resolve to read at least a chapter a day. Make a real effort to do this. It is worth it. You would never make a pianist unless you were prepared to practise regularly. Similarly, to get to know the Word of God you need to read it every day-or, at any rate, nearly every day.

Prayer will help you here. Tell its Author that you want to read His Book each day. Ask Him to strengthen your resolve to do so. And each day, as you settle down to read, ask Him to make

your reading enjoyable and fruitful.

There are many Bible-readers' prayers in Psalm 119. Here is one of them that may help you: "Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy Law."<sup>1</sup>

If possible, do your Bible readings in company. Perhaps husband, wife, parents, or children will agree to join you. Perhaps you can get together with one or two friends; if they are already Bible-believers, so much the better.

But whether you read alone or in company, don't just read and shut the book. You will benefit only a little that way. The real value of the reading comes from looking (or talking) it over afterwards, to see what you can learn from it.

This is what is meant by "reading with a purpose". When you have read a chapter, try to answer these three questions about it:

- (a) What did it convey to its first readers?
- (b) What does it tell us about God's work in the world?
- (c) What lessons can we learn from it to help us in everyday life?

You will soon find that nearly every chapter becomes interesting when you ask these questions. You won't always be able to answer all three. But with practice you will generally be able to answer at least one of them. Here are a few examples, based on readings from the Revised Standard Version. Open your own Bible and follow the chapters concerned.

### **Example 1: Philippians 4**

This is an example of a chapter where all three of our basic questions are easy to answer.

*Question (a).* This letter was written by Paul when he was in prison. (You would have learnt that fact if you had previously read chapter 1, verses 7 to 14.) Verse 4, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice!" must have shown Paul's readers that his spirit was uncrushable. His concern for them, which runs throughout the chapter, would have made them realise that he was still as unselfish as ever. His gratitude to them for their kindness to him must have stirred them deeply. Altogether, they must have been moved almost to tears by Paul's example of Christian courage, faith and selfless love.

*Question (b).* Verse 3, "my fellow workers whose names are in the book of life", shows that God promises eternal life, not to everybody, but to those who join His team of workers. Verse 18, "...the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God", shows that God is aware of every real sacrifice that men make for Christ's sake. And verse 19, "my God will supply every need of yours", shows that God repays such sacrifices, even in this present life.

*Question (c).* The lesson of verse 2, "I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord", is obvious: there is no place for longstanding quarrels in Christ's church.

The lesson of verses 6 and 7 is especially appropriate to our affluent, hectic, ulcer-ridden society. "Don't worry about tomorrow. Trust God to supply all your needs. That way you will receive a blessing that money cannot buy: contentment", it promises us. Verse **12** carries much the same message.

Verse 8 has another special message for our age: “Whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is any-thing worthy of praise, think about *these* things.” How can we do this if we feed our minds solely on the endless diet of crime and sin, violence and sex, supplied by TV, press and cinema?

### Example 2: Genesis 24

This is primarily a “Question (c)” chapter. It is packed full of valuable lessons about marriage. Why not try a little exercise here? Read the passage carefully with a pencil and paper at hand. After making allowance for the differences in customs between Abraham’s day and ours, note down all the lessons you can derive from this chapter of the Bible.

Do this now-before you read any further in this book. Then compare your own list with the list given below.

- (1) Parents ought to take a close personal interest in the well-being of their children, and seek to influence them in their choice of life partners (verses 1 to 4).
- (2) It is vitally important that believers should not marry un-believers (verse 3; note the emphasis implied by the word, “swear”).
- (3) Don’t rush into a compromise solution of a difficult marriage problem (verses 5 and 6).
- (4) Instead, trust God to provide a really satisfactory solution (verse 7).
- (5) But don’t be starry-eyed about the matter. Take whatever practical steps are called for in seeking a suitable marriage partner (verse 10).
- (6) At the same time, pray earnestly for God’s guidance (verses 12 to 14).
- (7) Base your choice of a partner on character, rather than on looks (verses 14 and 20; only a big-hearted, generous girl would have offered to water ten thirsty camels!).
- (8) Rely upon it, God will supply the right partner for us if we trust Him completely (verses 27 and 51).
- (9) Love-real love, lasting love-will surely follow, if only we let these principles guide us (verse 67).

### Example 3: 1 Corinthians 15: 1-28

This is essentially a “Question (b)” chapter. Try the same exercise as in the previous example, but this time note down the main principles of Christian doctrine contained in this passage. Then compare your list with the one below.

- (1) The way to be saved is to accept the true Christian gospel that Paul taught, and then abide by it (verses 1 and 2).
- (2) Christ died as a sacrifice for our sins (verse 3).
- (3) Then He rose from the dead. There is irrefutable evidence of this, because there were over 500 eye-witnesses (verses 4 to 8).
- (4) The fact that He rose is an absolutely essential part of the Christian religion (verses 12 to 19).
- (5) Christ’s followers also will rise bodily from the dead, one day (verses 20 to 22).
- (6) This will take place when Christ comes back to the earth (verse 23).
- (7) Some time later, death will be entirely abolished and God’s supremacy will then be unchallenged (verses 24 to 28).

## The Next Step

When you have worked through the “short list” of Bible books twice, you will be ready for the next step. Don't make the mistake of going straight for all the books that were left out of the selected list. Remember that they were omitted because they were the more difficult books of the Bible. To tackle them one after the other would only be to invite mental indigestion and disappointment.

A better way is now to approach the Bible as a whole, resolved this time to miss out nothing. That way you will be reading a happy mixture of familiar and unfamiliar, simpler and more difficult books.

There are two good methods of setting about this. One way is to continue the simple system of “one long or two short chapters a day”. To avoid spending too long on either Testament it would be best to read a book from each in turn—Genesis, Matthew, Exodus, Mark, Leviticus, Luke, and so on.

The other method is to use one of the published “Bible Calendars”, in which certain chapters are allocated to each day of the year. The best known of these is probably the one drawn up many years ago by R. M. McCheyne. It allocated four separate portions to every day, starting like this:

January 1	Genesis 1	Matthew 1	Ezra 1	Acts 1
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and finishing like this:

December 31	2 Chronicles 36	Revelation 22	Malachi 4	John 21
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The man with enough stamina to keep this up for a whole year would find he had read through the New Testament and the Psalms twice, and the rest of the Bible once. A generation ago these tables were still being bound up in one edition of the Authorised Version.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately they have since gone out of print, but similar tables in booklet form can still be obtained from some of the sectarian publishers.

Tables like this are mainly useful in a Bible reader's early years. They force the pace, and enable him to gain a broad acquaintance with the whole Bible quickly. When this has been achieved he will want to look at a smaller number of chapters in a day, but to study them in greater depth.

## Progressing from Bible Reading to Bible Study

There is no sharp line of demarcation between Bible reading and Bible study. Every thoughtful Bible reader is a Bible student. Nevertheless, there comes a time when the Bible reader realises he has passed the stage of being a beginner. He has read the whole Bible through two or three times, and feels at home anywhere in its pages. Now he feels ready to start digging deeper. What next?

Without a doubt, the first priority is to acquire a good study Bible. The modern translations

recommended so far are excellent reading Bibles for beginners. They are also useful tools for a student's shelf, to turn to when he wants a second opinion about a difficult passage. But as basic study Bibles they are woefully inadequate.

The best study Bible, of course, is a Hebrew Old Testament and a Greek New Testament, for those who can handle them competently. Most of us, however, have to be content with an English translation. Nearly all students are agreed that the best of these for study purposes is the English Revised Version of 1886.

There are two main reasons for this. It sticks more closely to the words of the original languages than any other leading translation. And in its more expensive editions it is supplied with a magnificent set of cross-references, which are invaluable to the student.

Another advantage of this version is that it can be bought in a sort of sandwich edition, which contains the Authorised (or King James) Version on the same page. In this way the reader gets two complete translations for the price (and the bulk) of one-and-a-bit.

This unique book is called *The Interlinear Bible*. It was originally published by the Cambridge University Press, but was dropped from their lists a few years ago. Fortunately it has now been reissued by another publisher, who has given it what it previously lacked: wide margins, for the student to write notes on.<sup>3</sup> This edition is not cheap, but it is almost certainly the best buy in study Bibles today.

## Cross References

Any good study Bible will bristle with footnotes and cross-references. Readers often refer to these as being "in the margin", because once upon a time they were printed down the edges of each page. Nowadays they usually appear in a centre column, or at the foot of the page. But the old name sticks. How, then, does the student make the best use of his "margin"?

As an example, take the very first verse of the New Testament, Matthew **1:1**. In my edition of the Revised Version (which, as already mentioned, has been provided with an unusually good "margin") the verse is printed like this:

- <sup>1a</sup> The book of the <sup>2</sup> generation of Jesus Christ,  
<sup>b</sup> the son of David, the son of Abraham.

In this short verse there are five interruptions, two indicated by numbers and three by letters. The numbers refer to the translators' comments, which appear at the bottom of the page like the footnotes in an ordinary book. (The translators of this version were very good at telling the reader where they were not sure of themselves, or where two alternative translations are possible. Full marks to them for this habit! I only wish modern translators did it to the same extent.)

The note (<sup>1</sup>) tells us that "the book of the generation of" can equally well be translated "the genealogy of". Note (<sup>2</sup>) says that the Greek word translated "generation" can also be translated "birth", and that it is translated this way in verse 18.

Now we turn to the letters. These link up with a long list of Bible references, running down the centre of the page. Against (a) we find, "Cp. Luke 3:23-38". The letters "Cp." stand for

“compare”. When we compare the passage mentioned, we see that Luke gives another list of ancestors of Jesus Christ—a useful piece of information.

When we follow up the letters (b) and (c) we really strike a gold-mine. Why should the very first sentence of the New Testament link Jesus Christ with two Old Testament characters? Turning up the cross references will supply the answer to this question, and a very interesting answer it is.

(b) invites us to turn up the following passages: 2nd Samuel 7:12-16; Psalm 132:11; Isaiah 11:1; Jeremiah 23:5; Luke 1:32, 69; John 7:4\*; Acts 2:30; Acts 13:23; Romans 1:3; 2nd Timothy 2:8; Revelation 22:16.

The first passage in this list is part of a promise that God made to David. It begins like this:

“And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish His kingdom. He shall build an house for My name, and I will stablish the throne of His kingdom for ever. I will be His Father, and He shall be My Son.”

If you turn up all these passages you will soon see that these promises made to David are very important. They tell us quite a lot about God's plan of salvation and what He intends to do in the world. The New Testament writers clearly regarded this as a vital part of the Gospel message.

When we come to (c) we find another list of passages, referring to some other promises made by God to Abraham. There are only three in this list (Genesis 22:18; Galatians 3:16; Romans 9:5). But we need not stop there. Each of these passages has, in turn, its own list of cross-references. By following these up we can compile a long list of passages about God's promises to Abraham.

It is evident from these passages that God's promises to Abraham also formed an important part of the Gospel. Among them we read Paul's declaration that the Gospel was actually preached to Abraham,<sup>4</sup> and the words of Jesus, “Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.”<sup>5</sup> In other words, the Christian Gospel does not begin in Matthew—it begins in Genesis.

All this we can learn from the very first verse of the New Testament, just by using the cross-references in the margin. No wonder that old hands at Bible study regard a good margin as the first essential in a Bible.

### **Other Aids to Study**

“Bible study?” said Margaret. “Oh, no, I could never do that. I'm not brainy. I should think you'd need a good education and a lot of books before you could be a proper Bible student.”

Like a lot of other people, Margaret had been put off by that unfortunate word, “study”. But Bible study is not like the type of study she had in mind. It is more like “nature study”, which just means taking an interest in nature and finding out what you can about it.

To be a Bible student you need only three essentials: a Bible, a pencil and paper, and the right attitude of mind. If you use these regularly and enthusiastically you can go a long way, as I have

tried to show in the earlier part of this chapter. Even if you never progress beyond these simple methods, you should end up knowing the Bible better than a good many ordained ministers.

But the time may come when you want to go a little further than these methods will take you. At that stage it is worth investing in three more tools: a concordance, a Bible dictionary, and a commentary.

A concordance is simply an index to the whole Bible. They come in three kinds: (1) short concordances, (2) complete English concordances, (3) complete concordances based on the Hebrew and Greek words, but set out in a form that an ordinary English reader can follow.

The first kind are not worth very much. They are cheap, but exasperating. To keep them short the compilers have to omit lots of passages. So they try to select just the verses that they think you will find useful. This, of course, is an impossible task, and half the time you will find that the passage you want is not there.

A complete concordance is a substantial volume. It lists all the words found in the English Bible (except for trivial words like “if”, “but”, “for”, “to” and “the”) and after each word quotes all the passages where that word occurs. A concordance like this has two main uses.

In the first place, it helps you to find half-remembered passages. If you cannot recall where “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son” occurs, the concordance will soon tell you. All you need to do is to look up the most uncommon word (in this case, “begotten”) and then glance down the list of passages containing that word until you see the one you want. You could, of course, find the verse by turning up one of the other words in it, such as “God”, “loved”, or “gave”. But then you would have a much longer list of passages to look through. So it always pays to choose the most unusual word.

The second use of a concordance is to enable you to study a theme. You may decide to make a character study of the apostle James, to see what lessons you can learn from his failures and successes. A complete concordance will point you to every place in the Bible where he is mentioned. Or you may want to study the history of a place, like Babylon, or of an object, like the tabernacle. Once more your concordance will show you where to look.

But if you want to study the use of a Bible word, like ~ or “salvation”, or “redeem”, an ordinary English concordance will not take you very far. It is here that the third type of concordance—that based on the occurrence of Hebrew and Greek word—comes into its own. Don't be put off at the thought of dabbling in strange languages; you can use these concordances without even knowing a single letter of the Greek alphabet.

For a simple example, suppose that you want to know what the New Testament teaches about Holy Communion. You look up the English word “communion”, and find that it occurs only four times. Twice it is applied to the sacrament;<sup>6</sup> once it is used to refer to the Christian's intimate association with the Holy Spirit;<sup>7</sup> and once to warn Christians not to become too intimate with unbelievers.<sup>8</sup>

But this is only a beginning. The concordance also tells us that “communion” is a translation of the Greek word *koinonia*, which is used twenty times in the Greek New Testament. In our English Bible (the Authorised Version) it is translated “fellowship” twelve times, and “communication”, “communicate”, “contribution”, and “distribution”, once each.

The concordance leads us to all these passages, and immediately we see how the early Christians used this word. "Communion", to them, meant fellowship, togetherness, comradeship, the spirit of one happy family obeying its Father in heaven, When they helped one another, that was "communion", just as surely as when they took bread and wine together. For instance, Paul could write:

"It hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain *contribution* for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem."<sup>9</sup>

"They glorify God for... your liberal *distribution* unto them."<sup>10</sup>

In both cases the word in italics is the translation of that Greek word *koinonia* (communion). Thus we learn that real Christian communion is a living, loving activity, of which the sacrament is only one aspect. Woe betide the so-called Christian who "takes communion" and then goes straight home to live a selfish life! He does not even know the meaning of the word "communion". And all this useful information, of great practical importance, emerges from looking up just one little word in a good concordance.

Two concordances of this kind are available, Young's<sup>11</sup> and Strong's.<sup>12</sup> Strong's contains fewer mistakes, and includes some useful features not found in Young's. But Young's is cheaper, and, because of the way it is set out, easier for the beginner to use.

### Dictionaries and Commentaries

All sorts of questions crop up that can best be answered by reference to a Bible dictionary. We all know what gold is, but what are frankincense and myrrh? And who were the Wise Men who brought these gifts? How big was a shekel, and a talent, and a bath, and an ephah, and all the other coins and weights and measures of the Bible?

If you want information of that sort, as well as snippets of history, geography, archaeology, biography, and a hundred and one other subjects, you need a good Bible dictionary. It should be reasonably up-to-date and comprehensive. And it is essential that it should have been compiled by Bible-believing scholars. For English readers this narrows the choice to one book: *The New Bible Dictionary*.<sup>13</sup> This 1,400-page work is splendid value for money.

When it comes to commentaries produced by Bible-believing scholars there is a wider choice. Even so, one of them stands out above all the others: *The New Bible Commentary Revised*.<sup>14</sup> As with its companion volume, the dictionary recommended above, its price is much less than its size and its quality would lead one to expect.

There are two main rules about commentaries. The first is to get hold of a good one; the second is to use it as little as possible! This advice may sound strange, but there is a good reason for it. About a hundred years ago a great Bible student, Dean Burgon, preached a sermon on Bible study. Although he was himself a writer of commentaries, he said this:

"Pray avoid commentaries and notes. - . - they will do more to nullify your reading than anything else which could be imagined. Your object is to obtain an insight into Holy Scripture, by acquiring the habit of reading it with intelligence and care; *not* to be saved trouble, and to be shown what *other persons* have thought about it."<sup>15</sup> (The italics are Burgon's.)

It is for this reason that I have not previously recommended the popular series of notes on daily Bible readings issued by the Scripture Union.<sup>16</sup> No doubt these serve a purpose, in persuading some people to read the Bible “the easy way”, who otherwise could not be persuaded to read it at all. But reading ten or a dozen verses, and then reading another man’s comments on them, can easily become like walking on crutches. It is important to develop your own spiritual muscles, by thinking out your own comments on what you read.

The best way to use a commentary is to treat it as a last resort. Always begin by seeing what you can get out of a passage yourself. If some problem baffles you, and you’re sure that you are really stuck, then see if you can find an explanation in your commentary. And always remember that commentators are only human, just like the rest of us. Never take it for granted that everything you read in a commentary is correct.

### Is It Really Necessary?

Well meaning people give all sorts of reasons for not reading the Bible.

“Salvation is by faith, not by Bible study. I’ve got faith, so what more do I need?”

“The essence of Christianity is love, and unselfishness. Bible study is a selfish thing, it only benefits the person studying. I believe it’s better to go out and help other people, than to sit at home studying the Bible.”

“The Christian religion is centred on a divine Person, not a book.”

There is some truth in these remarks. Salvation is indeed by faith. Christianity certainly is a religion of unselfishness. It undoubtedly does centre on Jesus Christ. But does it follow that Bible reading is unnecessary? Or is there a good reason for every man and woman to read the Bible?

Let’s stop for a moment and see how we reached this point. This book, in the first place, was addressed to people who lacked faith in the Bible. Part One gave them some reasons why they should believe; Part Two disposed of some of the excuses for unbelief. But that did not settle the issue. There is only one way for a person to decide finally whether he believes the Bible or not: he must read the Bible diligently for himself.

This is because Bible study will help to create faith in those who lack it, and strengthen the faith of those who already possess it. But it does even more than that. Consider these words of the apostle Paul:

“Thou hast known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.”<sup>17</sup>

In other words, the Bible brings men and women to Jesus Christ. It helps them to live better lives. It develops Christian character. *Bible reading generates love, as well as faith in Christ.*

That, at least, is what Paul claims. But is this true? Does the Bible really have this power, to transform the hearts, the minds, the lives, the characters, of those who read it?

This book has asked, and tried to answer, many questions about the Bible. This question is the greatest of them all. The one remaining chapter will be devoted to it.

### ***A Power in the Earth***

The three of us walked down an ill-lit side street in an Eastern European city. Carl and Jan spoke to me in undertones, glancing furtively over their shoulders from time to time, to make sure we could not be overheard.

Jan was carrying a large bag. It looked as if it could have held guns, or explosives. By all appearances we could have been plotting some act of violence against the State.

But appearances were deceptive. The bag contained nothing but Bibles and Christian literature. We were discussing ways of spreading the gospel behind the Iron Curtain. Nevertheless, this was a risky business for Carl and Jan. Jan had already been caught and punished for smuggling Bibles into the country from the West, and another conviction for "subversive activities" could lead to a long prison sentence.

In every communist country men like Carl and Jan are risking their liberty to distribute the Bible. They have various sources of supply:

Bibles smuggled in from the West; Bibles printed secretly on primitive printing presses or duplicators concealed in private houses; even Bibles written out by hand with the aid of carbon paper.

Savage persecution has not stopped them. Many of them have spent long periods in prison; some have died through the hardships inflicted on them. But the work goes on. Those who are imprisoned comfort themselves with the words that Paul wrote from a Roman gaol:

"I am exposed to hardship, even to the point of being shut up like a common criminal; but the Word of God is not shut up!"<sup>1</sup>

I asked Carl who were winning, the Bible-believers or the communist authorities. "In this country our numbers are increasing steadily," he replied with a sparkle in his eyes. His face clouded a little. "In Russia things are more difficult. A great evangelical revival is stirring there, but it cannot get enough Bibles to feed upon. The Russian government is more efficient than ours in the battle to suppress the Bible. But despite everything, the Book is still circulating in Russia. And you should see how the Power of God works in those Russians who are able to read it!"

### **The Bible in History**

No one can say how the circulation of the Bible in communist lands may influence the history of our times. But one thing is certain. The Bible has already had far more influence on the history of mankind than any other book—the writings of Karl Marx not excepted.

The historian, Lecky, was an unbeliever. Yet he felt obliged to write:

"The simple record of three short years of active life [he was referring to the life of Jesus] has done more to regenerate and to soften mankind, than all the disquisitions of philosophers and than all the exhortations of moralists."<sup>2</sup>

In his heyday Napoleon was the most powerful ruler the earth had ever seen. Yet he recognised a power greater than his own, when he said:

“The Bible is no mere book, but a *living power* that conquers all who oppose it.”<sup>3</sup>

Only very rarely has a whole community taken the Bible to its heart. But when this has happened, the results have been dramatic. Before the Bible came to Fiji its inhabitants were cannibals, feared throughout the South Pacific for their cruelty. Then missionaries came, taught the Fijians to read, and gave them a Bible in their own language. Within a generation Fiji became a land of peace and friendship.

On other occasions the Bible has been only one of several factors influencing history at the same time. The Protestant Reformation is perhaps the best example of this. Some of the reformers were true men of the Bible, prepared to lay down their lives peaceably in Christ's service. Some were men of mixed motives. Others were little more than political schemers in disguise, prepared to stain their hands with blood to achieve their own ends.

It would be ridiculous to blame the Bible for the crimes of such men. Instead, we should be thankful that in that age, and in every age since, the scene was lightened by a minority of real Bible-believers. Without their influence the history of Europe would have been dark indeed.

### **Power in the Heart**

One day in 1940 a Korean pastor of the name of Son was sent to prison by the Japanese authorities.<sup>4</sup> His crime: refusing to bow down and worship at a shrine to the Japanese “Divine Emperor”.

His wife was allowed to spend a few precious moments with him before the guard took him away. She opened a Bible, and urged him never to yield. Her finger pointed out a verse as she spoke: “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”<sup>5</sup>

Pastor Son endured years of suffering, first under the Japanese and later under the Chinese communists. But he never did give in. That verse, and others like it, made him feel he could face anything. Like many another man in distress, he found that the Bible in the mind is a power in the heart.

A few years ago my friend John wrote to me from another continent, and told me that he was now separated from his wife. A series of little incidents had led to a bitter quarrel, in which he was sure he was in the right. His wife had gone home to her parents and said she would never return unless he apologised. Since he considered he had nothing to apologise for, the result was a deadlock. The situation looked hopeless.

I wrote and told him that, whether he was in the right or not, his Christian duty was to humble himself before his wife for the sake of peace. “Christianity,” I said, “is the one religion in the world where the person in the right has to give in to the person in the wrong.” I quoted the words of Paul:

“Why do ye not rather take wrong? Why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?”<sup>6</sup>

He was a very strong-willed man. No other power on earth would have moved him to go against his own desires. But he could not resist the power of the Word of God. He lost his pride and saved his marriage.

In 1962 Russia began installing atomic missiles in Cuba. The Americans reacted vigorously, and for a few days the world trembled on the brink of war. One day my two children heard what was going on, and became terrified. When they said they were too scared to go to bed, my wife and I wondered what to do.

We decided it was a time to put our religion to the test. Since the age of five the children had been encouraged to join with us in daily Bible readings, and were taught to respect the Bible as God's Book. So we set them to work, copying out this verse in coloured crayons:

“The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them.”<sup>7</sup>

Within the hour two coloured texts were pinned triumphantly above the heads of the youngsters' beds. Soon after they contentedly fell asleep.

### **To Trust or Not To Trust?**

Those three stories have a common feature. In each case the people concerned accepted the whole *Bible* as the *infallible* Word of God. They did not stop to ask, “But is that particular verse *trustworthy*?” *They had the same attitude to Scripture as Jesus and His apostles: if it was in the Bible, then they could trust it, implicitly.*

Take away this conviction, and at once the Bible is robbed of most of its power. If Pastor Son had been like a lot of modern pastors, he might have replied to his wife, “Yes, but some scholars doubt whether the Book of Revelation is genuine. That verse might be a second-century addition to the text of the Bible.” If that had been their attitude, would he and his wife have had the inner power to stand up to long years of persecution? Probably not.

This illustrates the great tragedy of our age. Unbelievers sneeringly refer to Christianity as a spent force. So far as a majority of church members is concerned, this accusation is undoubtedly true. They lack the conviction that the Bible is the living Word of the living God, and they have stopped (or never started) reading it. Thus they have thrown away their birthright. The Word of God has no chance of being a power in their lives. Without even realising it, they are fulfilling Bible prophecy:

“In the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, ... *having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof.*”<sup>8</sup>

But the unbeliever only sees part of the picture. He ignores the vital minority of believers to whom the Word is still a source of great power. Some years ago the manager of an overseas depot of the British and Foreign Bible Society came to my home town on leave. We had a meal together, and the conversation ran something like this:

“I suppose you must meet a lot of missionaries in your work?”

“Of course! I'm dealing with them all the time.”

“In that case perhaps you can answer a question for me. I've heard it said that most Protestant missionaries-unlike most church members in this country-are believers in a wholly inspired,

infallible Bible. Is this true?"

"Yes. In my experience, that is true."

"Then why is this?"

"I should have thought it was obvious. A missionary's life is extremely hard. Few men and women have the strength of character to endure it by themselves. Something else is needed, to give them strength beyond their own. When you believe that the Bible really is the Word of God, it gives you that extra power."

In 1969 statistics were quoted to support this view. At that time 62 per cent of all the Protestant missionaries in the world were said to be believers in a wholly inspired Bible.<sup>9</sup> What a contrast with the situation in the western world as a whole! In Britain the real Bible-believing Christian stands out as a comparative rarity. People tend to regard him as a hangover from the nineteenth century, like a horse and cart in a city street.

Yet it is men and women like him who form the bulk of the world's Protestant missionaries. It is largely due to their efforts that the knowledge of Jesus Christ is still spreading in Africa and Asia. There may not be much power left in the churches of Europe and America. But what there is must surely be due to the power of the Word of God, working in the hearts of those who believe it.

### **Slow, but Sure**

Jesus told several different parables about a farmer sowing seed. "The seed," He said, "is the Word of God."<sup>10</sup>

There was never anything wrong with the seed. When it was treated aright it yielded a great crop.<sup>11</sup> But often it fell on stony soil, or was allowed to be choked by weeds or eaten by birds.<sup>12</sup> When that happened, even the best of seed never had a chance.

Thus Jesus appealed to men and women: give the Word of God a fair chance; open your hearts to receive it. And then He offered a further word of warning:

"The Kingdom of God is like a man who scatters seed in his field. He sleeps at night, is up and about during the day, and all the while the seeds are sprouting and growing. Yet he does not know how it happens. The soil itself makes the plant grow and bear fruit: first the tender stalk appears, then the head, and finally the head full of grain."<sup>13</sup>

It takes a long time for a plant to grow and bear fruit. Given the right conditions the seed will certainly develop. But beyond certain limits there is nothing we can do to speed up the development. The process must take place in its own time.

So Jesus warns us: don't expect changes to occur all at once. The Word of God can work wonders in us-if we let it. But the Word of God has a tough job to do. Human nature-your nature, and mine

-is poor material to start with. The Word of God can do great things with it; but it takes time.

This is the kind of thing that the Bible says it can do for you:

*Rebirth:* "Being *born again*, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of

God.”<sup>14</sup>

*Power: “The Word of God is quick (living) and powerful.”*<sup>15</sup>

*“The Word of God which effectually worketh also in you that believe.”*<sup>16</sup>

*Salvation: “Receive with meekness the implanted Word, which is able to save your souls. But be ye doers of the Word and not hearers only, deluding your own selves.”*<sup>17</sup>

In this last quotation James tells us something more. It is not enough to believe the Word and read the Word. We must also exert ourselves to “do” the Word of God.

This book is mainly about believing the Bible. Only one chapter has dealt with reading it. And “doing” (or living) the Bible has hardly been mentioned until now.

Yet all three are important. They are, or should be, inseparable. If we really believe the Bible, we can't help but read it and try to live up to it.

And even if we don't quite believe it, there is still only one safe course to take. We still have everything to gain by reading it and obeying it, because then belief will surely come to us in time. Paul wrote, “I know Him whom I have believed.”<sup>18</sup> To “know” Jesus-really know Him, intimately and understandingly-was to believe in Him. And in the same way today, to “know” the Bible is to believe it.

You may not notice much change in yourself during your first few weeks of Bible reading. But if you keep it up, the time will come when you realise that something has begun to happen. The world around you will begin to look different, just as it does when the train you have been sitting in starts to move. With a thrill of excitement you will realise that it's not the world that is changing-it is you!

After this first exquisite taste of God's power working in you, you will have setbacks. We all do. Even Paul became frightened and depressed,<sup>19</sup> and Peter once sobbed his heart out at the realisation that he had let Jesus down.<sup>20</sup>

But if you persevere you will find that the power of God's Word can triumph over all your weaknesses. You will find your convictions growing steadily stronger. You will find your character being moulded, as if by an unseen Hand.

You will come to see ever more clearly how God is working in the world today, and how you may work with Him. Life will become full of purpose, richer and happier. Like King David three thousand years before you, you will want to say to all the world: “Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good!”<sup>21</sup>

## Notes and References

The symbol \* against the title of a book means that it is specially recommended.

Biblical quotations are usually from the Authorised Version unless otherwise stated.

RV = Revised Version                      NEB = New English Bible RSV = Revised Standard Version

mv = Today's English Version

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2 Luke 7:22

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### Chapter 2

1 Deut. 28:64-6 and 37

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5 Ezek. 11:17

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10 Gen. 27:29. See also Gen 12:3 and Num. 24:9

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#### **Chapter 4**

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- 7 Ps. 22:8
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- 21 Zech. 9:9, 10
- 22 Mark 11:9, 10
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- 24 Ps. 45:7
- 25 John 8:46
- 26 1 Pet. 1:18-19; 2:22; 3:18
- 27 Ps. 16:9-11
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- 30 Ps. 110:4
- 31 Matt. 22:41-46
- 32 2 Chr. 26:16-20
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- 2 White Paper, *Statements Relating to the Atomic Bomb*. H.M.S.O., London, 1945
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- 5 Matt. 24:3

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- 11 Zech. 8:7, 8; 12:10, 11; 13:6
- 12 Luke 21:25,26
- 13 Isa. 13:10
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- 4 Compare Gen. 8:13 and Gen. 11:10
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- 22 Rom. 6:23
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- 24 John 6:35
- 25 Luke 22:44
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- 2 Rom. 5:12-17
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  - 14 Gen. 11:32; 12:1-4; Acts 7:4
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