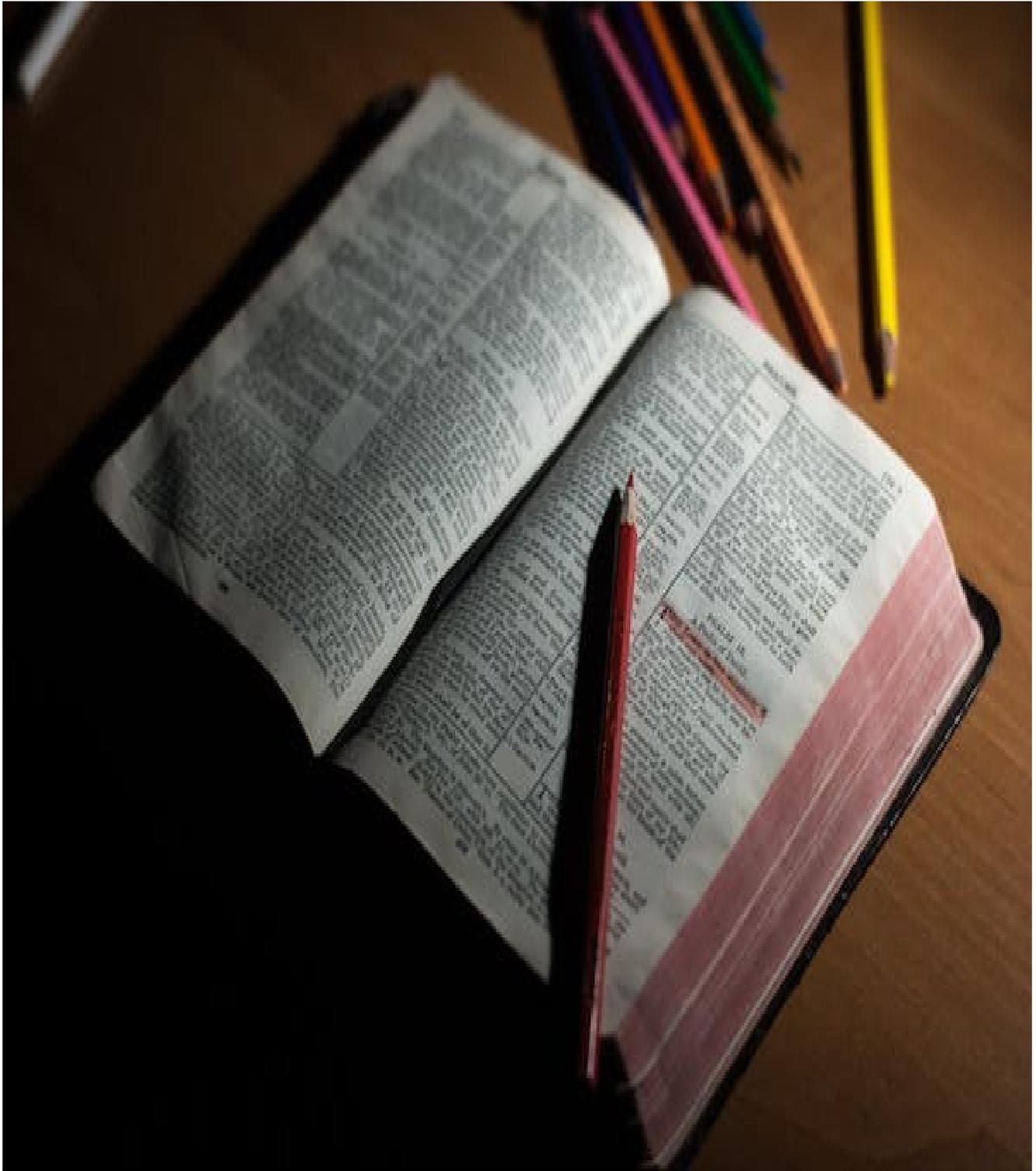


THE STORMRIDER ISSUE 14



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Hello and welcome to The Stormrider Magazine Issue 14. In this issue we are going to look at the miracle of the Bible as a book, its authenticity, its reliability and its Divine inspiration. I have also included an article titled The Downgrade Controversy And Faith



For The Upgrade. This piece discusses the beginnings of theological Liberalism, Charles Spurgens battle against it and why we hold to a high view of scripture. God bless you!

Shawn Stevens

I want to express in the clearest language possible that all statements made in this magazine are meant to be taken not in malice towards any identifiable people group but rather as discussion on issues of public interest, for public benefit, in good faith. I believe that my views on the issues contained here are also consistent with our faith beliefs which are contained in our statement of faith which can be viewed on our websites. Whether you agree or disagree with what I have stated here, we bless you. My articles are meant to be read with an open mind. By reading these articles you may find material that you find objectionable. By viewing the material, or any part of the material, printed in this magazine, and any part of the magazine and its pages, you agree to waive any legal or equitable rights or remedies you have or may have against Shawn Stevens or Ramona Stevens in respect to material that you find offensive or objectionable contained in this magazine. I and we at freedomandsocialorder.com accept no responsibility or liability for any harms or losses that may occur as result of following any information found on this site. Do not consider information found here to be legal advice from ourselves to yourself. Do not use information found here if you don't agree to these terms. I am not a legal authority and do not propose to be viewed as such. By reading the material of this magazine or any part of this magazine, you agree to indemnify and hold harmless Shawn Stevens and Ramona Stevens and you specifically acknowledge and agree that Shawn Stevens and Ramona Stevens will not be liable for comments deemed defamatory, offensive or damaging and agree to dismiss any legal claims that you may have against Shawn Stevens or Ramona Stevens relating to the contents of this magazine.

Shawn Stevens

God's Book for Man The Bible

Thy word is very pure: therefore thy servant loveth it.

Psalm 119.140 (King James Version)

These words were said by King David around the tenth century B.C. From that time until now, there have been millions of people who claim to love the Bible. Is the Bible “very pure” and does it stand up to higher criticism? Has it been accurately passed on from early history to our day? Is it credible and, if so, just what does it have to say?

We believe that the Bible is God's book for man. Its authorship is reliable and it has been passed on to us accurately from the time of its first writing. It has both archaeological and prophetic credibility to support its claims. It has a message of good news for mankind.

AUTHORSHIP & INTERNAL STRENGTHS

This great book consists of sixty-six smaller books. It was penned by forty different people over a span of fifteen hundred years. Some of its authors were fishermen and farmers, others were kings and highly educated people. One man was a medical doctor. But is there

evidence to give them credibility, or are they just relating old myths? Let's examine both the Old and the New Testament on this point.

The Old Testament is comprised of thirty-nine books. These books contain history, poetry, prophecy and theology. Let's focus for a moment on the history. Critics of the Bible have tried to disprove it by searching for archaeological evidence supporting their hypothesis, but the evidence leans the other way.

- 1) Critics used to say that Moses could not have written the first five books of the Bible because there was no written language at that time. Since 1974, archaeologists have dug up seventeen thousand tablets at Tell Mardikh in Northern Syria which prove that there were written records at least a thousand years before Moses lived.
- 2) One thousand Mesopotamian tablets were uncovered in 1925 and are known as the Nuzi Tablets. These records give us background information on several early biblical patriarchs such as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.
- 3) Cuneiform tablets from the Assyrian emperors verify such biblical characters as Omri, Ahab, Jehu, Menahem, Hoshea, Ahaz, Hezekiah, Manasseh, Josiah and Jehoaiachin.
- 4) The ancient biblical city of Jericho has been discovered.
- 5) Critics used to claim that the Hittite civilization, mentioned in the Bible, never existed because there was no evidence for it. So much evidence has been dug up on the Hittites since then, that you can now get a doctorate in Hittite studies from the University of Chicago.

This is a brief look at some of the evidence. Much more could be said on this point of archeology. The Old Testament is reliable and accurate. But what of the New Testament? Who wrote it and what is its claim to credibility? The New Testament was written, for the most part, by disciples of Jesus. Being His disciples, they were eyewitnesses of His life and heard exactly what He taught.

Here is what Peter tells us:

For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty.

2 Peter 1.16

Also, the Apostle John writes:

What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life— and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us— what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.

1 John 1.1-3

The things that were “from the beginning” have been handed down to us by eyewitnesses who tell of what they heard, saw and what they touched with their hands. They were there at Jesus’ baptism, and they were there when He healed the sick and opened blind eyes. They saw the resurrected Christ. (See 1 Corinthians 15.3-8).

The strength of the disciples' testimony runs deeper still. All of the twelve disciples, except one, were martyred for their claims. John, the one who wasn't martyred, was greatly persecuted too. Instead of execution, he was punished by being exiled to the island of Patmos for the rest of his life, all because he would not renounce his claims of Christian belief. Some would point out that other people throughout history have died for their religion as well. Consider the difference, however, in the case of the early Christian martyrs. While other religious leaders also have taught a theology about God and moral values, these Christian disciples were also giving testimony to an historical event, namely, that they had seen the resurrected Christ. The question is this: Wouldn't some of the disciples, when faced with death, have admitted that their testimony was false, if it indeed was? Some might argue that Judas did and that is why he betrayed Christ. This is not true as shown by his own words; "... 'I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.' ..." (Matthew 27.4). Also, note that Judas died by suicide, never witnessed the resurrection, and never wrote any of the Bible.

THE TRANSMISSION OF THE TEXTS

*The sum of Your word is truth,
And every one of Your righteous ordinances is everlasting.*

Psalms 119.160

Even if what the biblical writers said was accurate, how can we know for sure that what they said hasn't been lost over time? Or, in other words, how do we know that we have an accurate copy of the original books of the Bible? Let's first look at the Old Testament.

When the books of the Old Testament were composed, they were written on papyrus. This material deteriorated quickly and, consequently, many copies of the original needed to be made. This was done by a specialized group of men known as scribes. It was of extreme importance to the scribes that they duplicated the original exactly as it was written.

Meticulous devotion to duplication is evident in the Masoretic text, of which the existing copies are dated circa 1000 AD. This great copy of the Hebrew Old Testament was done by a group of scribes known as the Masoretics, who, after a copy had been made, counted everything to make sure that not so much as one word was added or subtracted; “They counted, for example, the number of times each letter of the alphabet occurs in each book; they pointed out the middle letter of the Pentateuch and the middle letter of the whole Hebrew Bible, and made even more detailed calculations than these.”² Basically, everything that could be counted was counted, even the number of letters in every book!

Another group of scribes were the Talmudists (AD 100-500). According to Samuel Davidson, some of the procedures that they used when copying the originals were: “A synagogue roll must be written on the skins of clean animals... every skin must contain a certain number of columns, equal throughout the entire codex. The length of each column must not extend over less than 48 or more than 60 lines; and the breadth must consist of 30 letters. The whole copy must be first-lined; and if three words be written without a line,

it is worthless... An authentic copy must be the exemplar, from which the transcriber ought not in the least deviate. No word or letter, not even a yod, must be written from memory, ...Between every consonant the space of a hair or thread must intervene; between every new parashah, or section, the breadth of nine consonants; between every book, three lines. The fifth book of Moses must terminate exactly with a line;... Besides this, the copyist must sit in full Jewish dress, wash his whole body, not begin to write the name of God with a pen newly dipped in ink, and should a king address him while writing that name he must take no notice of him.”³

Another ancient manuscript of the Old and New Testament is the Peshita. It is written entirely in Aramaic. An exact date of this work is uncertain, but the British museum contains copies that date back to the fifth and seventh centuries. Some of these copies were written without the use of vowels, which means they were written prior to the fifth century when the vowel system was invented. A Bible translator, George M. Lamsa, in commenting on the Peshita, says these words; “The biblical manuscripts were carefully and zealously handed down from one generation to another and kept in the massive stone walls of the ancient churches and in caves. They were written on parchment and many of them survive to the present day. When these texts were copied by expert scribes, they were carefully examined for accuracy before they were dedicated and permitted to be read in churches. Even one missing letter would render the text void.”⁴

So, as with the Masoretic text and the work of the Talmudists, similarly, the copiers of the Peshita were diligent, faithful and meticulous in their work.

An even earlier manuscript is the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Hebrew text originally translated in Alexandria, Egypt, during the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphus (285-247 BC). We have fragmented portions from as far back as 100 BC, and complete copies that were copied in the fourth century AD, still in existence today.

The accuracy of the Old Testament has also been affirmed in recent times by the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Before this discovery in 1947, the oldest existing Hebrew Old Testament manuscript was the Masoretic text, dated between 925 and 1008 AD. The Dead Sea Scrolls gave us fragments of almost every book in the Old Testament, many dating back to 150 BC, which are over a thousand years older. Probably the most important portions of these scrolls were two complete copies of the book of Isaiah.⁵

Here is what textual critic, Gleason Archer, has to say; “Even though the two copies of Isaiah discovered in Qumran Cave 1 near the Dead Sea in 1947 were a thousand years earlier than the oldest dated manuscript previously known, (AD 980), they proved to be word for word identical with our standard Hebrew Bible in more than 95 percent of the text. The 5 percent of variation consisted chiefly of obvious slips of the pen and variations of spelling.”⁶

The New Testament also stands strong under textual criticism. When any piece of old literature is being investigated as to whether or not it is historically accurate, a series of tests-called an historiography-is done. This examines several things, such as the number of manuscripts (hand written copies) of the piece that are in existence, and also, the span of time between the original document and the existing manuscripts.

Let's examine the number of manuscripts we have of the New Testament. In doing so, we find that there are more manuscripts of the New Testament than of any other piece of literature ever studied. There are 24,633 partial or complete copies in existence today. Second to the New Testament, in this area of ancient literature, is the Iliad which was written by Homer and is considered one of the great works of ancient literature. We have 643 surviving manuscripts. This is considered high. We have seven copies of Plato's Tetralogies. There are forty-nine of Aristotle's and only eight of Herodotus' historical writings.⁷

As well as the biblical manuscripts, we also have writings from the early church fathers that contain countless quotations of the New Testament. According to J. Harold Greenlee, these quotes "are so extensive that the New Testament could virtually be reconstructed from them without the use of New Testament manuscripts."⁸

Sir David Dalrymple further explored this topic and concluded that even if we had no copies of the New Testament, we could piece back together all but eleven verses of it from these quotes, all taken from

a period of time no later than the third century.⁹ Just from two of the fathers living till 220 AD, Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian, we have 9,400 quotations. By 235 AD we have 1,300 more from Hippolytus. Nineteen years more brings us to the time of Origen, who added another whopping 18,000 quotations! Cyprian died just a brief four years later, leaving another 1,030 quotations.¹⁰ Prior to the council of Nicea, (AD 325), we have some 32,000 quotations of scripture from the writings of Christians.¹¹ If we include all the early church fathers, that number reaches to more than a staggering 86,400!¹²

We have said that the second great test of an historiography is the time span between the original writing and the date of the manuscripts that we have. In the case of the New Testament, the time span is amazingly short.

A.T. Robinson was a scholar who set out to prove that the New Testament was written in the late first to early second century. After examining the evidence, he radically changed his mind. He went on to write a book called “Redating the New Testament,” in which he argued that the New Testament, in its entirety, was written before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, only forty years after Christ’s death.¹³

Compare this short time span between the autographs and existing copies of the writings to that found in writings of other long time

religions. For example, the teachings of Buddha were not written down until five hundred years after his death. Nor is this kind of brief span, relating to New Testament documents, common in works of ancient classical writings or in secular history. The Iliad, which we mentioned before, also has a five hundred year gap from when it was originally written to our earliest copy. In the case of Plato's Tetralogies, that gap is 1200 years.¹⁴

Sir Fredrick Kenyon, who was the past director and principal librarian of the British Museum, and probably the greatest textual critic of the twentieth century, said this:

The interval between the dates of the original composition (of the New Testament) and the earliest extant evidence becomes so small as to be, in fact, negligible, and the last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed. Both the authenticity and general integrity of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established. 15

So, what are we to conclude? After examining the Old Testament, we saw the meticulous rituals the Masoretic and Talmudist scribes carried out when copying the originals. As well, we discussed ancient manuscripts such as the Peshita and the Septuagint. Finally, we discussed the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, in particular the Isaiah manuscripts, which are one thousand years older than our previous earliest Hebrew texts and yet consistent with our copies. The New Testament, we discovered, exists in over twenty-four thousand manuscripts, giving it overwhelming textual credibility,

especially in comparison to other ancient writings. We also observed the remarkable brevity in time span from when the original New Testament books were written to our earliest existing copies. For these reasons, we believe we have an accurate copy of the Holy Bible.

EVIDENCE OF FULFILLED PROPHECY

We have defended the accuracy of the Bible and its careful transmission through time. But what is there that links it to God? How can we say that it is God's Word? We do say that it is God's Word and that there is reasonable evidence to prove it. We said earlier that the Old Testament contained history, poetry and prophecy. Now let's take a closer look at Bible prophecy, and specifically, prophecy concerning the Christ. John said, "If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater; ..." (1 John 5.9).

The Old Testament, as we have said, contains many books of prophecy. These prophecies are about many things, such as, the fate of certain nations, events in Israel's future and of a coming Christ who would save the people. Jesus said, "...These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." (Luke 24.44).

There are over three hundred specific prophecies, first written down over four hundred years before His birth, that have been fulfilled by Jesus Christ. Let's examine a few of them.

The prophecy that the Christ would come from the lineage of Jacob (see Numbers 24.17) was fulfilled in Luke 3.23,34. That He would be of the house of David (see Jeremiah 23.5) was fulfilled in Luke 3.23,31. That He would be born in Bethlehem (see Micah 5.2) was fulfilled in Matthew 2.1. That people would divide up His garments and cast lots for them (see Psalm 22.18) was fulfilled in John 19.23,24. That He would be violently killed (see Isaiah 53.5-12) was fulfilled in Matthew 27.26,35.

Josh McDowell compares these prophecies to an address. For a moment, think of your street address. It has seven pieces of information: your name, house number, street number or name, the city, the province or state, your postal code and the country that you live in. With these seven pieces of information someone could locate you from anywhere on the earth. These seven things together single you out from every other person on the face of the earth. In the same way, God wrote an address to identify His Son from everyone in history past, or history future, by recording hundreds of specific items of information that would be fulfilled in Jesus Christ.¹⁶

Professor Peter W. Stoner worked out the mathematical probabilities of whether or not a person could accidentally fulfill the prophecies

of the Bible concerning the Christ. The results of his research showed that for any man to fulfill just eight of the three hundred prophecies worked out to a probability of 1 times 10 to the 17th power. That is 1 in every 100,000,000,000,000,000 times. This worked out to be the same probability as if, after covering the whole state of Texas with silver dollars, you were to take one silver dollar and mark it, and then a blindfolded man, on his first pick, would pick that checked silver dollar from all the others.¹⁷

The American Scientific Affiliation had this to say concerning the evidence; “The manuscript for ‘Science Speaks’ has been reviewed by a committee of the American Scientific Affiliation members, and by the Executive Council of the same group and has been found, in general, to be dependable and accurate in regard to the scientific material presented. The mathematical analysis included, is based upon principals of probability which are thoroughly sound, and Professor Stoner has applied these principles in a proper and convincing way.”¹⁸

We have stated that Jesus fulfilled over three hundred prophecies. We listed a few of them and compared them to a person’s address. We looked at the calculations of Professor Peter Stoner, that the probability of only eight of the three hundred Messianic prophecies being fulfilled in one man worked out to one times ten to the seventeenth power. We also read the American Scientific Affiliation’s support of Professor Stoner’s calculations. Remember, if we accept the “witness of men,” the “witness of God” is greater.

God has witnessed to the inspiration of the Bible by speaking to the prophets in the Old Testament and fulfilling the prophecies in the New Testament in the life of Jesus Christ.

JESUS' VIEW OF THE SCRIPTURES

Another valuable question to ask is, what did Jesus say about the Scriptures that we call the Bible? First, let's divide the Bible into three sections; the Old Testament, the words of Jesus and the teachings of His disciples.

1. The Old Testament

Jesus Christ had great reverence for the Scriptures of the Old Testament. He referred to historical accounts in the Old Testament as factual events. Some examples would be: His reference to the murders of Abel and Zechariah, in Luke 11.50-51; His reference to the account of Noah and the great flood, in Matthew 24.36-39; His reference, in John 3.14, to the account of Moses in the wilderness, lifting up the serpent on a pole; His reference, in Matthew 12.39-41, to the account of the prophet Jonah being three days and three nights in the belly of a fish, and later preaching to the people of Nineveh. He also refers to the account of King David eating sacred showbread and sharing it with his men in Matthew 12.3-4.

Jesus rebuked the religious leaders for a lack of knowledge of the Scriptures and a failure to practice them. (See Matthew 22.29 and Matthew 23.23).

Jesus used Old Testament Scripture to teach spiritual truth. Firstly, He taught truth concerning Himself; “And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.” (Luke 24.27 King James Version). See also John 5.39).

Secondly, He taught truth concerning future judgments; “And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all. Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed.” (Luke 17:26-30 KJV). In this scripture Jesus is giving solemn warning of His Father’s judgment to come by reminding us of these great and fearful acts of God which occurred in Old Testament days.

As well, Jesus openly declared Old Testament writers to be inspired by God, for example:

For David himself said by the Holy Ghost, The Lord said to my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool.

Mark 12.36 (KJV)

Another example would be; “Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place ...” (Matthew 24.15).

Jesus appealed to the authority of the Old Testament by frequently saying, “... it is written, ...” (Matthew 4.10 and see Luke 4.4). This comes from the Greek, “gegraptai”¹⁹ -“it stands written.”¹⁹ Thus Jesus is referring to the Scriptures as “the permanent unchangeable witness of the eternal God committed to writing for our instruction.”¹⁹

Jesus also said:

Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.

Matthew 5.17-18 (KJV)

2. The Words of Jesus

We said that our second division of the Bible would be the words of Jesus Christ. So then, what did Jesus say about the authority of His own words? Jesus emphatically stated, "... 'My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me. If anyone is willing to do His will, he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or *whether* I speak from Myself. " (John 7.16-17). Also, Jesus said, "... the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life." (John 6.63). On one occasion, Jesus rebuked a crowd of unbelieving Jews with this statement; "I have many things to speak and to judge concerning you, but He who sent Me is true; and the things which I heard from Him, these I speak to the world." (John 8.26). The same crowd later reacted with hostility, to which He replied, "But as it is, you are seeking to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth, which I heard from God; ..." (John 8.40).

3. The Teachings of His Disciples

Our final division of the Bible would be the teachings of His disciples. So then, what were Jesus' comments on the authority of His disciple's teachings? First of all, Jesus commanded His disciples to teach all the things which He had taught them. He commissioned them with these words; "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen." (Matthew 28.19-20 KJV). We further see that they were sent not only to teach, but also, to teach with Jesus'

authority; “So Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace *be* with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.’” (John 20.21).

To aid them in this task, Jesus promised them the enabling of the Holy Spirit; “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you. ” (John 14.26).

But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said that He takes of Mine and will disclose it to you.

John 16.13-15

In summary, from all these verses, we see Jesus’ great reverence for the Scriptures we now know as the Holy Bible. He not only referred to historical events in the Old Testament as factual, but He taught spiritual truth from them. Jesus rebuked religious leaders for their lack of knowledge of, and their lack of practising of, the Scriptures. He openly declared Old Testament authors to be speaking by the Holy Spirit. He then stated that His own teaching was not His, but rather, that of His heavenly Father and that His words were spirit and life. Further, He commissioned His disciples to teach all of His instructions and promised the aid of the Holy Spirit.

CONCLUSION

Out of all the books that one can read, a book like the Bible will never be found. It is so rich and deep that you can learn new things every time you read it. We have examined a lot of evidence. Both the Old Testament and New Testament are credible. Archeology applauds the Bible. The New Testament contains eyewitness testimony. It's authors were greatly persecuted for their claims. All but one died a martyr's death rather than deny their testimony. The manuscripts that we have, of both the Old and New Testaments, are accurate. We have in existence copies of the book of Isaiah that are ninety-five percent word for word identical with the Dead Sea Scrolls. There are over 24,000 manuscripts (partial or complete) of the New Testament, making it the number one piece of ancient writing for manuscript credibility. Also, the time gap between the original writings of the New Testament and our copies is remarkably short.

We know that the "testimony of God" is greater than the "testimony of men" and God has spoken to this world by prophesying in the Old Testament and fulfilling prophecy in the New. Over three hundred specific prophecies were fulfilled in the life of Jesus. We learned that the probability of just eight of these prophecies being fulfilled in the life of any man were very slim.

The Bible is God's book for man! As a mentor, it teaches us the holiness of God. As a mirror, it reveals our hearts and in its pages we see ourselves for who we really are. As a map, it points us to Jesus

Christ and guides us through repentance and faith. What have we done with the free will that God has given us? The decisions that we have made, where have they taken us? We see that God loved us so much that He sent His Son to earth. The Lord Jesus Christ died in our place, as our substitute, and victoriously rose from the dead three days later.

The Bible calls us to place our trust in Christ and be forgiven. The deep stains of sin can be taken away by Jesus. The Bible calls us to repent. It says that if we confess with our mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in our heart that God has raised Jesus from the dead we will be saved. It says "... whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." (Romans 10:13 KJV)

Shawn Stevens

THE BIBLE

This book reveals the mind of God, the state of man, the way of salvation, the doom of sinners, and the happiness of believers. Its doctrines are holy, its precepts are binding, its histories are true, and its decisions are immutable. Read it to be wise, believe it to be safe, and practice it to be holy. It contains light to direct you, food to support you, and comfort to cheer you. It is the traveler's map, the pilgrim's staff, the pilot's compass, the soldier's sword, and the Christian's charter. Here too, heaven is opened, and the gates of hell disclosed. Christ is its grand subject, our good is its design,

and the glory of God is its end. It should fill the memory, rule the heart, and guide the feet. Read it slowly, frequently, prayerfully. It is a mine of wealth, a paradise of glory, and a river of pleasure. It is given you in life, will be opened at the judgment, and remembered for ever. It involves highest responsibility, will reward the greatest labor, and condemn all who trifle with its sacred contents. Owned, it is riches; studied, it is wisdom; trusted, it is salvation; loved, it is character; and obeyed, it is power.

From The Gideon Bible

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Scriptures marked KJV are taken from the King James version of the Holy Bible

The Downgrade Controversy And Faith for the Upgrade

The party everywhere apparent has a faith fashioned for the present century - perhaps we ought rather to say, for the present month. The sixteenth century gospel it derides, and that indeed, of every period except the present most enlightened era. It will have no creed because it can have none: it is continually on the move; it is not what it is to-day. It's shout for 'liberty,' its delight is invention, its element is change. On the other hand, there still survive, amid the blaze of nineteenth century light, a few whom these superior persons call 'fossils': that is to say, there are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ who consider that the true gospel is no new gospel but is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever. These do not believe in 'advanced views,' but judge that the view of truth which saved a soul in the second century will save a soul now, and

that a form of teaching which was unknown till the last few years is of very dubious value, and is, in all probability, 'another gospel which is not another.' 1

Charles H. Spurgeon

In the nineteenth century, modernism and theological liberalism gained wide acceptance in England. Many ministers began to view fundamentalism as being narrow, irrelevant and unaccommodating. Reverend Charles H. Spurgeon reacted against this, calling it a downward trend, and warned his fellow Englishmen of the gravity of an apostasy of this kind.

The pervasive influence of modernism upon nineteenth-century thought can hardly be understated. It was an era of intellectualism and rationalism. The spirit of criticism expressed itself in education and in common life. Theological dogmas were scrutinized and discarded in the name of logic and reason. Inquiry into science was applauded. Re-evaluation of social and religious values was thought to be an essential task in achieving the goal of greater individualism and humanism.² Three Books, such as “Principles of Geology,” “Antiquity of Man,” and Charles Darwin’s “Origin of Species,” were introducing and popularizing new ideas that proposed to explain the history of the natural world and the

origins of life in ways that boldly challenged the claims of the Bible. 4 5

The influence of modernism on nineteenth-century thought carried over into theological circles and gave rise to liberal theology in England. Modernism's attack on belief in the transcendent and supernatural cultivated the perfect atmosphere for modern biblical criticism to flourish. This new age demanded theological fluidity 7 and a spirituality that was not confined within rigid lines. 8 Liberal theology argued that theological positions must incorporate modern enlightenment. 9 It embraced the modernist concept of humanism, claiming that God's highest self-expression was found in a human man, Christ. 10 It felt that this kind of fluidity would bring a freshness to the study of the Bible and also might help win back the modernist, educated community which was unsympathetic towards evangelicalism. 11

One doctrinal tenet that liberal theology challenged and redefined was the inspiration of the Bible. The former position, that the Bible was the inspired and inerrant word of God, was first challenged by a compromised position which claimed that various biblical books had varying degrees of divine inspiration. This implied that Scripture was not necessarily true in all of its claims. 12

Not only did liberal theology challenge and redefine the inspiration of the Bible, it also promoted a new form of interpreting the Bible. It argued that spiritual truths were conveyed allegorically and poetically and that this should be the governing rule used when interpreting the Bible. Such a governing rule dismissed a literal interpretation of such things as the creation narrative and miracles. 13

As well as challenging miracles, theological liberalism challenged the doctrine of the atonement. The evangelical position that the death of Christ was a substitutionary sacrifice on man's behalf, which appeased the wrath of God, became open for debate. 14 The purpose for the death of Christ began to be viewed as simply an example of self-sacrifice for us to follow, rather than a price paid redemptively. 15

In a short period of time, theological liberalism became widely accepted in nineteenth-century England. Initially, many English theologians were influenced by liberal German theologians. The German professor, J. G. T. Eichoran (1752-1827), seemed to be the first to use the expression, "higher criticism." 16 Alberecht Rirschel (1822-1889) was another liberal German theologian. He rejected the doctrine of original sin 17 and the juristic element in Christ's work. 18 He believed that the modern man wanted, above all other things, to live according to reason and that Christianity could aid and

strengthen him in this endeavour. He believed that Christianity was an outlook upon life and morality but not an immediate relationship with God. 19 Some have viewed him as the father of liberal theology. 20

While German liberal theology was being read in England, English liberal theologians were spreading their teaching, as well. Joseph Preistley (1733-1804) began teaching that the virgin birth was false, that Christ was less than infallible and that the teachings of the Apostle Paul were not given absolute authority. Edward Evanson (1731-1805) denied the apostolic authorship of the Gospel of John. 21 Thomas Belsham (1750-1829) began teaching that the Pentateuch had more than one author and that the creation narratives were in contradiction with scientific knowledge. 22 Possibly the most significant English liberal theologian of this time was D. F. Strauss. He determined to differentiate between the facts of history and what he viewed as mythological expressions of Christian ideas. He proposed to “get behind” the accounts of Christ and find out who Jesus “really was.” 23 He determined that “in the person and acts of Jesus no supernaturalism shall be suffered to remain.” 24 The persuasive influence of these liberal theologians, and others, can hardly be understated. Anglican Bishop, J. C. Ryle (1816-1900), stated; “Whether we like it or not we cannot shut higher criticism out. Like frogs in the plague of Egypt, it creeps in everywhere.” 25

While theological liberalism was spreading like frogs in England, not all ministers accepted these changes. Perhaps the most vocal opponent to the new teachings was Reverend Charles H. Spurgeon. He began publishing a warning to all Christians in his periodical, "The Sword and the Trowel." A series of messages became known as "The Down Grade" articles. The first two articles were not actually written by Spurgeon but, rather, by an associate of his, Robert Schindler. Spurgeon continued this series, beginning with the third article. To give a mental picture of what they were trying to say, they began speaking of a high pinnacle. This pinnacle had a great downgrade. Truth and churches occupy a position on the top of the pinnacle. As many churches compromised their beliefs, they gradually became disconnected from the truth. With this disconnection, they lost their footing also, and began tumbling down the great downgrade.

In the third issue, Spurgeon began warning his readers of some specific things. He lamented that preachers were spreading unbelief. He warned that such ministers are ten times more dangerous than atheists. ²⁶ He argued that along with the abandonment of sound doctrine also went the living of a holy life. Spurgeon warned that some ministers were amusing themselves at play houses or theatres. He said that

there was a time in England when a Nonconformist minister would lose his whole church for making such a compromise. 27 He lamented that the doctrines of atonement 28 and of the inspiration of the Scriptures were being derided, that the Holy Spirit was being degraded, that punishment for sin and belief in the resurrection was treated as fiction. 29 He reminded his readers that many of them were called by the name of “Nonconformist,” and that “Our nonconformity is beyond measure precious as a vital spiritual force, but only while it remains such will it justify its own existence.” 30 With strong and compelling language, Spurgeon communicated the gravity of the downgrade issue. Liberal theology was not just another side of Christianity, it was apostasy. He declared; “A new religion has been initiated, which is no more Christianity than chalk is cheese.” 31

Spurgeon told his readers that the stand that he was taking was simply his duty to take as a minister. He assured them that he did not gain pleasure in stirring up antagonism and that he had not written in hate. His motive for writing was that “the gospel is too precious for us to be indifferent to its adulteration. By the life we bear to the Lord Jesus we are bound to defend the treasure with which He has put us in trust.” 32

Spurgeon was well aware that liberal theology had spread within his own denomination. He weighed the decision and then made the difficult choice to withdraw his personal membership. It wasn't easy for him, for there were others within the denomination who were loyal to him and who shared his concerns.

Spurgeon opposed the humanistic focus of modern liberalism. He maintained that theology should not be man-centred, nor should it be shaped to accommodate human wisdom. He lamented that, "The new religion practically sets 'thought' above revelation, and, constitutes man the supreme judge of what ought to be true." 33 Spurgeon's decision to oppose theological liberalism, both by word and by action of disassociation, offended many in nineteenth-century England. The Down Grade articles shocked many evangelicals who were going with the flow of modern thought. Spurgeon was urged to soften his rhetoric. 34 Because Spurgeon was suffering from kidney problems during this time, some felt that his writings were just the rantings of a stressed, dying man. Others thought that Spurgeon was being too vague. 35 Some claimed that Spurgeon was crying "wolf," making an issue unnecessarily. Others responded with a defence of theological liberalism. One newspaper, *The Christian World*, said that young ministers, and others, must now decide whether or not they would accept the "'modern thought' which in Mr Spurgeon's eyes is a 'deadly cobra'," but in their

eyes was “The glory of the century.” 36 This magazine said further that “Mr. Spurgeon professes to despise or ignore the science and criticism at the progressive life and thought of the present day.” 37 John Clifford, the vice-president of the denomination in 1887, said that Spurgeon’s statements had not been proved. 38 Spurgeon was subsequently censored in April, 1888. 39

Was liberal theology the glory of the nineteenth century? Did it bring to England a new and improved form of Christianity that Englishmen of other generations did not know? While it is true that sometimes God did express Himself through human form, liberal theology was wrong to centre its teachings on human expression and humanism. Their redefinition of the inspiration of the Bible was too great an alteration to be tolerated. It directly undermined the authority of the Bible, the very grounds of Christianity itself. Although the Bible does convey some of its truths through allegory and poetry, this does not mean that we should view the bulk of Scripture in this way. By making allegorical interpretations the governing rule of hermeneutics, many in Spurgeon’s day were able to dismiss the difficult teachings or commands of Scripture. While Christ’s sacrifice was an example, it was foremost an atonement. By challenging the doctrine of the atonement, nineteenth-century English theologians were challenging Christianity’s most central theme. By simply flowing with the downgrade, many Victorian Englishmen were making a

compromise. Spurgeon may have been suffering from kidney problems but the nineteenth-century modernist Church was suffering from spiritual sickness that was much more serious. Spurgeon was not being vague. He named his issues: the inspiration of the Scriptures, the atonement, punishment for sin, the resurrection and holiness. Then he addressed these issues directly, clearly and with great persuasion. This is in contrast to many liberal theologians whose writings were deeply philosophical and often mind-bending in their complexity. It is because Spurgeon approached these issues so directly that he was asked to temper his rhetoric. It was precisely his strong preaching that was needed to communicate the seriousness of the situation. As Spurgeon said; "A little plain speaking would do the world of good just now." 40 Because liberalism had spread in nineteenth-century England to the extent that it had, it cannot fairly be said that Spurgeon was crying "wolf." The old story of the boy who cried "wolf" does not apply because, as Spurgeon has said; "The parallels only fail in the all important point that he cried 'Wolf' when there was none, and we are crying 'Wolf' when packs of them are howling so loudly that it would be superfluous for us to shout at all if a wretched indifferentism had not brought a deep slumber upon those who ought to guard the flocks." 41 Spurgeon was not overreacting on his point, for theological liberalism in England was as plenteous as the frogs in Egypt. The liberal theologians of Spurgeons day were more dangerous to the English Church than

atheists. Atheists did not have the trust of the English churchmen. Many liberal theologians did have this trust and were undermining the truth of sacred Scripture. Spurgeon was a Nonconformist in the true sense of the word and voiced his concerns out of his duty as a minister. While it is true that nineteenth-century England saw many changes in technology, politics and philosophy, does this necessitate a change in spirituality? Spurgeon's question is a fair one; "Do men really believe that there is a gospel for each century?" 42

Spurgeon's question is a fair one and his stand was a true one; theological liberalism had effectively placed many Churches on the downgrade.

Shawn Stevens

ENDNOTES

1. Charles H. Spurgeon, "The Sword and the Trowel," Dec. 1888, *The "Down Grade" Controversy* (Pasadena: Pilgrim Publications, n.d), 71.
2. Vernon F. Storr, *The Development of English Theology in the Nineteenth Century 1800-1860* (London: Longmans Green and Co., 1913), 201.
3. Louis A. Drummond comments, "Moreover, as is so often the case, that general humanistic atmosphere soon infiltrated theological circles. It began to manifest itself as an emphasis on human development and far less on a God-centred approach to the realities of life as prevailed for centuries." Louis A. Drummond, *Spurgeon Prince of Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1992), 661. Taken from *Spurgeon Prince of Preachers* © Copyright 1992 by Louis A. Drummond. Published by Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, MI. Used by permission of the publisher. All rights reserved.
4. H. A. Wilson, "The Development of Evangelicalism," in *Liberal Evangelicalism* (London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd., 1970), 19-20.
5. Louis A. Drummond comments; "... Evolutionary theory began to take such a hold on the mindset of many Victorians that resulted in a humanistic approach to all reality." Louis A. Drummond, *Spurgeon Prince of Preachers*, 661. Taken from *Spurgeon Prince of Preachers* © Copyright 1992 by

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7. Alan P. F. Sell, *Theology in Turmoil : The Roots, Course and Significance of the Conservative-Liberal Debate in Modern Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986).

8. Vernon F. Storr, "The Bible and Its Value," *Liberal Evangelicalism*, 87.

9. H. A. Wilson, "The Development of Evangelicalism," in *Liberal Evangelicalism*, 26-27.

10. E. A. Burroughs, "Evangelicalism and Personality," in *Liberal Evangelicalism*, 52-53.

11. Robert Anderson, *The Bible and Modern Criticism* (London: Pickering and Inglis, n.d.), 39.

12. *Ibid.*, 178-171.

13. Vernon F. Storr, "The Bible and its Value," in *Liberal Evangelicalism*, 83-85.

14. H. A. Wilson, "The Development Of Evangelicalism," in *Liberal Evangelicalism*, 23-24.

15. Alan P. F. Sell, *Theology in Turmoil: The Roots, Course and Significance of the Conservative-Liberal Debate in Modern Theology*, 128.

16. *Ibid.*, 40.

17. *Ibid.*, 82.

18. *Ibid.*, 85.

19. Karl Barth, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century : Its Background and History* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmann Publishing Co., 2001), 641, 644.

20. Alan P. F. Sell, *Theology in Turmoil: The Roots, Course and Significance of Conservative-Liberal Debate in Modern Theology*, 74.

21. *Ibid.*, 41.

22. *Ibid.*, 42.

23. D. F. Strauss, Quoted in Louis A. Drummond, *Spurgeon Prince Of Preachers*, 662.

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24. D. F. Strauss, "The Life of Jesus," quoted in *Theology in Turmoil: The Roots, Course and Significance of the Conservative-Liberal Debate in Modern Theology*, 45-46.

25. J. C. Ryle, quoted in *Theology in Turmoil: The Roots, Course and Significance of the Conservative-Liberal Debate in Modern Theology*, 51.

26. Charles H. Spurgeon, "The Sword and the Trowel," Aug. 1887, *The "Down Grade" Controversy* (Pasadena: Pilgrim Publications, n.d.), 19.

27. *Ibid.*, 18.

28. Because Spurgeon was a Calvinist, it would be easy to misinterpret the issue that he was addressing with regards to the atonement. In the Down Grade Articles, he was not directing his

objections towards those such as Methodists, who held Arminian understanding of the atonement. He clarifies this point in these words; "In our fellowship with Methodists of all grades we have found them firmly adhering to those great evangelical doctrines for which we contend ... We care far more for the central evangelical truths than we do for Calvinism as a system ... Those who hold the eternal verities of salvation, and yet do not see all that we believe and embrace, are by no means the objects of our opposition: our warfare is with men who are giving up the atoning sacrifice, denying the inspiration of Holy Scriptures, and casting slurs upon justification by faith. The present struggle is not a debate upon the question of Calvinism or Arminianism, but of the truth of God versus the inventions of men." Charles H. Spurgeon, quoted in Louis A. Drummond, *Spurgeon Prince of Preachers*, 678. Taken from *Spurgeon Prince of Preachers* © Copyright 1992 by Louis A. Drummond. Published by Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, MI. Used by permission of the publisher. All rights reserved.

29. Charles H. Spurgeon, "The Sword and the Trowel," Aug. 1887, The "Down Grade" Controversy, 17.

30. *Ibid.*, 19.

31. *Ibid.*, 17.

32. Charles H. Spurgeon, "The Sword and the Trowel," Sept. 1887, The "Down Grade" Controversy, 23.

33. Charles H. Spurgeon, "Choice Teachings for the Chosen," in *The Forgotten Spurgeon* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1973), 187.

34. John MacArthur, *Ashamed of the Gospel : When the Church Becomes Like the World* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1993), 207.

35. *Ibid.*, 208.

36. "The Christian World," quoted in Charles H. Spurgeon, "The Sword and the Trowel," Aug. 1887, The "Down Grade" Controversy, 30.

37. W. Copeland Bowie, "The Christian World," Sept. 22, 1887 in *The Forgotten Spurgeon*, 184.

38. Ernst W. Bacon, *Spurgeon: Heir of the Puritans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1967), 133.

39. Susannah Spurgeon and Joseph Harrald, Cd., *C.H. Spurgeon Autobiography*. 2 Vols (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1973), 470.

40. Charles H. Spurgeon, "The Sword and the Trowel," Aug. 1887, The "Down Grade" Controversy, 20.

41. Charles H. Spurgeon, "The Sword and the Trowel" Oct. 1887, The "Down Grade" Controversy (Pasadena: Pilgrim Publications, n.d.), 28.

42. Charles H. Spurgeon, "The Sword and the Trowel," Apr. 1888, The "Down Grade" Controversy, 50.

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