

CHAPTER 1

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT ITS ORIGIN

What does the Bible have to say about its origin? Interestingly enough, the authors of the sixty-six books that make up the Holy Scriptures do not attempt to prove their divine inspiration. They state simply that their messages are from God, and then pass on to deal with the messages rather than attempt to prove their assertions regarding the source of their information.

In our present investigation of the gift of prophecy, the divine inspiration of the Bible will be taken for granted, and no attempt will be made to prove it. It is the purpose of a study in Evidences of Christianity or in Bible Doctrines to gather the proofs for the inspiration of the Scriptures and study them in a systematic manner. This study is devoted to the operation of the prophetic gift through the ages, and presupposes a confidence in the Bible and its divinely inspired authorship.

“Thus Saith the Lord.” - A careful reading of the Bible reveals a remarkable unity, even uniformity, in the expressions of its authors regarding their understanding of the source of their messages. In some instances no comment is made indicating the writer’s convictions, but the messages themselves make clear that they are of the same origin as the books claiming inspiration. The regularity with which the writers claim their messages to be from God may appear repetitious, and yet every repetition is with a purpose that is not hard to discover.

These men did not want to take credit to themselves for what they wrote. Though their writings bore the impress of their own personality, education, background, and environment, the messages are from God, and the writers wanted no one to mistake that fact. They were honest men, spiritual, keen-minded, having through experience considerable insight into the needs of their people. They were men capable of bearing responsibility and serving as leaders. But these personal qualifications were insufficient to make them safe guides for their nation, and the men themselves recognized that fact. Consequently, when God had spoken to them, they wanted the people to know of a certainty that the message was of divine rather than human origin.

Again, the way of the prophet was seldom easy. In most instances the very nature of the messages borne tended to turn the people against

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the messengers. None enjoy, and few are willing, to receive rebuke; in fact, the denunciations of numerous Old Testament prophets have become proverbial. The words of Amos pronouncing judgment on Judah are typical: "Thus saith the Lord; For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they have despised the law of the Lord, and have not kept His commandments, and their lies caused them to err, after the which their fathers have walked: but I will send a fire upon Judah, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem." Amos 2:4, 5. Who would have cared to preach such a message without attaching a "thus saith the Lord"?

On the other hand, human promises pertaining to the future are notably unreliable. A man may pledge in good faith, and tomorrow lose the means on which he had counted to fulfill his vow. The prophetic speakers and writers wanted their audiences to recognize and acknowledge that reproof, assurance, and prediction came from a source above and beyond themselves - the only Source on which they could always depend. Who but God could look into the future so much as forty-two literal months, to say nothing of forty-two prophetic months, in such a prediction as this: "And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months." Revelation 13:5. John, in the first few verses of the Revelation, traces his messages back to God Himself.

It is likely also that the circumstances existing at the time a prophet gave his message to the people had some influence on the use of a variety of expressions by which the prophet made plain that the message he brought was not his own, but God's. Ezekiel was called to the prophetic office while he was with the captive people of Judah in Babylonia. Daniel and his companions of the royal family had been taken to Babylon in the first captivity of 605 b.c. A few years later, in the second captivity of 597 b.c, Ezekiel of the priestly family was among those uprooted from home and taken to the pagan capital. Despite the prediction of Jeremiah that the captivity would last for seventy years, false prophets and leaders had encouraged the people to look forward to a speedy return from Babylon. They could hardly imagine God's allowing His people to remain subject to a foreign nation for so long a time.

To counter false hopes and provide spiritual leadership for the exiles, God called young Ezekiel to the prophetic office. The people were unwilling to believe that Jerusalem would be completely

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destroyed, that they would have to remain in Babylon the full span of Jeremiah's prediction, or that God was with them in their exile. What they needed was a vision of the glory of God, an assurance that all was under His watchful eye. They needed to be reminded of the surety of God's word. What He had said about the future of Jerusalem and of the exiles would surely come to pass.

Under these circumstances it is not difficult to see why Ezekiel repeatedly declared that his message was from the Lord. Three hundred or more times he used expressions like these: "The word of the Lord came," "Thus saith the Lord," "He said unto me," "Thou shalt speak My words," "I the Lord have spoken it," "I am the Lord," "Hear the word of the Lord." If ever a people needed assurance that God was speaking to them, the children of Israel in Babylonian captivity did. And God needed a representative among them. At the close of the prophetic period, He intended to take them back to Palestine and there re-establish them as a nation. In the meantime they had to be prepared for the return so that they would not lapse into the idolatry that had been largely responsible for their exile. Ezekiel's repeated assurance that the voice of God was speaking to them served as a major factor in leading many to recognize the hand of God in their captivity and in the plans for restoration.

"Given by Inspiration." - Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." 2 Timothy 3:16. "All scripture is God-breathed," is the way Paul expressed it originally. It is not the thought that God breathed His message only into man, but that He breathed it out, or spoke it, through man as His agent. Peter's words should be put along with Paul's. "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." 2 Peter 1:21. God's word, spoken at the prompting of the Holy Spirit, was the message of the prophets. They could recognize no other source. They confidently believed they were voicing the will of God for His people. Peter, preaching to the people in Solomon's porch, told of things "which God before had showed by the mouth of all His prophets." Acts 3:18. The men were God's, the messages were His - God-breathed.

It "Shall Come to Pass." - Prediction is cited by the prophets as a major indication of the divine source of their messages, and is the nearest approach to the presentation of evidences of inspiration. Isaiah issued God's challenge to the false gods so highly regarded by Israel as

well as the heathen nations. "Let them bring them forth, and show us what shall happen: let them show the former things, what they be, that we may consider them, and know the latter end of them; or declare us things for to come. Show the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that ye are gods." Isaiah 41:22, 23. It is apparent from the language of the writers that they frequently recognized that the events they recorded were to take place in the far distant future. Neither men nor false gods could see into the future. Therefore, they said, you may have confidence our messages are from God, for He alone can predict things to come.

Daniel's reply to Nebuchadnezzar's request for an interpretation of his dream shows clearly the general attitude of the prophets. "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.... And He that revealeth secrets maketh known to thee what shall come to pass. But as for me, this secret is not revealed to me for any wisdom that I have more than any living." Daniel 2:27-30. Disclaiming any credit for himself, and pointing out the inability of the king's counselors, Daniel gave full recognition to God's insight into the future. Before his specific interpretation of the dreams of the chief butler and chief baker, Joseph asked the men, "Do not interpretations belong to God?" Genesis 40:8. A little later, while talking to Pharaoh concerning his dream, Joseph acknowledged, "It is not in me: God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace." Genesis 41 :16. Throughout the Bible there are many similar indications. The last book of the New Testament opens in the same vein. "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to show unto His servants things which must shortly come to pass; and He sent and signified it by His angel unto His servant John: who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw." Revelation 1:1, 2.

Never did a prophet claim for himself any supernatural power to penetrate the future and predict coming events. Whenever prediction was involved in the messages of the prophets, they made it clear that they believed their enlightenment to be from God.

The Writers Speak of Other Authors

Not only did the prophets claim for themselves divine inspiration, but they recognized the working of the prophetic gift in the experience

of other men, both contemporary and of earlier generations. Zechariah decried the stubbornness of Israel- “Yea, they made their hearts as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law, and the words which the Lord of hosts hath sent in His Spirit by the former prophets: therefore came a great wrath from the Lord of hosts.” Zechariah 7:12. Hosea recognized the divine appointment of Moses to the prophetic leadership of Israel out of Egypt. “And by a prophet the Lord brought Israel out of Egypt, and by a prophet was he preserved.” Hosea 12:13. In New Testament times Peter proclaimed that God had spoken of the final restitution of all things “by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.” Acts 3:21. Peter also declared that the sufferings of Christ had been “showed by the mouth of all His prophets,” and that their predictions had been fulfilled. Acts 3:18. The prophets knew that the manifestation of the gift of prophecy was not something peculiar to themselves or their generation. They acknowledge that the position of the former prophets was comparable with their own, and their words of equivalent value.

Perhaps even more striking than the mere recognition of the existence of former prophets are the references to their writings as “Scripture.” This is largely a New Testament expression, but several passages designate portions of both the Old and New Testaments as “Scripture.” Paul made a general statement, speaking of the gospel promise, “Which He had promised afore by His prophets in the Holy Scriptures.” Romans 1:2. Referring to the record of Abraham’s experience in Genesis, the apostle queries, “For what saith the Scripture?” Romans 4:3. In Romans 10:11 Paul alludes to statements made in both Isaiah and Jeremiah. A little later he speaks of the record of Elijah’s life in 1 Kings as “Scripture.” Romans 11:2, 3. Peter adds his testimony regarding the book of Isaiah by saying that one of Isaiah’s Messianic prophecies “is contained in the Scripture.” 1 Peter 2:6. The same apostle witnesses that Paul’s epistles contain some things difficult to be understood “which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures.” 2 Peter 3:15,16. Jesus Himself, quoting from the Psalms, asked, “Did ye never read in the Scriptures, ‘The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner?’” Matthew 21:42. Not only did Bible writers recognize the works of the earlier prophets as a part of the Scripture record, but, as in the case of Peter with Paul, there was recognition of a contemporary prophet as an author of sacred writings.

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In addition to the designation of certain portions of the Bible as "Scripture," we find multiplied quotations or paraphrases of words and verses introduced by "it is written" or a similar expression. Perhaps most noteworthy of these are the Saviour's three quotations from Deuteronomy recorded in Matthew 4:4, 7, 10. It will prove profitable to consult a concordance and look up a number of the passages referred to under "written."

Another expression appearing frequently in the New Testament is "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet." Matthew 1:22. Many variations of this thought appear. Here we find a clear recognition of the predictive element in the work of the prophet. Later prophets testified that they saw, or knew of, the fulfillment of predictions of the earlier prophets. Such statements are made frequently in the New Testament concerning the life experience of Jesus, because of the large number of Old Testament Messianic prophecies which were recognized as being fulfilled in Him. He bore repeated testimony to the fulfillment of the prophecies of the early seers.

Use of Earlier Writings

Still another and more subtle mark of the confidence of the later Bible writers in the earlier group, and a clear indication of their careful study and wide knowledge of the former writings, is the manner in which the language of later books incorporates' more of phraseology and ideas of earlier books. The simplest way to see something of the tie-in between the two Testaments is to use the ordinary marginal references in the Bible. Crosschecking will reveal scores of ideas and expressions taken directly from Old Testament language used by New Testament writers. A thorough study will produce hundreds of such items. The book of the Revelation is probably the best example. Of the approximately 400 verses in the Revelation, more than three-fifths contain old Testament language. About 550 references are made to passages in the Old Testament. It has been suggested that it is doubtful there is a single sentence not somewhat dependent on the Old Testament for some of its materials. Sometimes the quotations are exact, again there are allusions! As a sample of what may be found throughout the book to a greater or less degree, it will be of interest to notice in parallel columns selections from Revelation 18 which reveal the similar expressions found in the Old Testament.

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John's mind must have been steeped in Old Testament language for him to draw so fully upon it to describe the things that were presented to him in "the Revelation of Jesus Christ." Were it not for the similarity between the figures and symbols used in the New Testament and the Old, we would, in numerous instances, have scant basis for arriving at correct interpretations of prophecies. The regular use of the language of the older portions of the Scriptures gives us one of our best insights into the knowledge of earlier writings possessed by those prophets who came later. They searched diligently for an understanding of all that had been recorded before their time. "Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow." 1 Peter 1:11. Daniel gives us an example of the type of studying done. "In the first year of his [Darius's] reign I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem." Daniel 9:2; cf. Jeremiah 25:11, 12. While Daniel and Jeremiah were contemporaneous prophets during the first part of the seventy-year period, Daniel studied diligently the product of his fellow prophet. The sentiment "It is written" runs throughout the whole of the Bible.

Claims of Unity

In presenting the prophecies of the first advent of Jesus, all the prophets played their part. This does not necessarily mean that every book of the Bible contains direct Messianic predictions, or that we have a record of predictions from each of the prophets whom God has used. It simply indicates that all of them introduced messages pertaining to the coming Saviour in some phase of their work and teaching. "To Him give all the prophets witness." Acts 10:43. "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for He hath visited and redeemed His people, and hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David; as He spake by the mouth of His holy prophets, which have been since the world began." Luke 1:68-70. "And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." "And He said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning Me." Luke 24:27, 44.

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Jesus showed no hesitancy in turning to the record of the prophets and tracing the complete, unified story of the coming Saviour, which had been fulfilled in His own life. There was no need to set aside portions as inaccurate and others as needless. The prophets had not made mistakes; their testimonies needed no apology. With a directness characteristic of Bible writings, these men pointed out in detail the events of the life and ministry of Christ long centuries before He was born in Bethlehem. They vividly portrayed His character and told of the influence of His life on other men. From varying viewpoints, but without contradictions, they made hundreds of references to the coming One.¹ All fitted together so perfectly that one can still trace the events and be more certain today than ever before of the common source of inspiration of all the prophets.

1. See Psalms 22:18; 16:10; 69:21; Isaiah 7:14; 53:3, 7, 9; 61:1; Micah 5:2. See also marginal references throughout the four Gospels.

SUMMARY

1. The Bible makes no direct attempt to prove its inspiration. It is repeatedly asserted that individual writers received their messages from God, but no general attempt at proof is undertaken.

2. In a variety of ways Bible writers claim inspiration for themselves, for earlier writers, and for contemporaries.

3. Multiplied quotations, references to the writings of earlier prophets, and allusions on the part of later Bible writers indicate the confidence these men had in the inspiration of their predecessors.

4. A unity exists throughout the Bible which reveals a common source of information for all the writers.

5. From the reading of the Bible one gains the impression that the prophets were convicted that God was using them to communicate to their fellows His messages of instruction, counsel, and admonition.

FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. What significance do you attach to the fact that no real attempt is made in the Bible to prove the inspiration of the Bible writers? Would not such a presentation be particularly helpful to us today?

2. Make a list of some of the many different expressions used by the various Bible authors showing that they believed they received their messages from God.

3. Expand the list of suggested reasons why the prophets wanted it clearly recognized that their messages were not their own, but God's.

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4. How do you account for the fact that some books of the Bible lay no formal claim to divine inspiration? Can you defend their inclusion in the Bible canon?

5. Find a number of Old Testament passages that are quoted in the New Testament. What circumstances called for each quotation? Was it used for proof? For identification? For admonition? Are there some that at first glance seem to be taken out of their setting?

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