

## *The Phenomena of Scripture*

**Everett F. Harrison**

[p.237]

During most of the centuries spanned by the history of the Christian Church it has been customary to speak of the Bible as the Word of God. Today many Protestants refuse to make this identification. One of the contributing factors in this change of attitude is the unwillingness to consider a record divine which is marred by inaccuracies. The Bible may contain the Word of God, or be the vehicle for the Word, it is said, but can no longer be equated with that Word itself.

It is maintained that the view of verbal inspiration could hold the field only so long as the divine factor in its composition was magnified to the neglect of the human. Obviously, if God be admitted as the Author of Scripture, error in the original text becomes unthinkable, lest the very character of God be impugned. The demand for more recognition of the human element in the Bible is sometimes fortified by an appeal to the theanthropic person of our Lord. In him the divine consented to be yoked to the human with all its limitations. So, it is contended, the divine factor in the making of Scripture was pleased to yoke itself to the human despite the frailties of the latter. The comparison is interesting, but if it is made from the standpoint of seeking to justify the ways of God in producing his Word through men who stained the record with errors, the comparison is quite inept, for it logically involves the imputation of shortcoming in one way or another to the person of Christ. It would be more appropriate to point to the phenomenon of the Christian worker, who may be labelled a man of God, despite his sinfulness, because of the operation of God upon him and through him, but in that case the analogy with a unique activity of divine inspiration breaks down.

[p.238]

The advocate of verbal inspiration quite naturally seeks on his own part to make use of the prestige of our Lord in order to buttress his position. This is done principally by appealing to Christ's blanket endorsement of the Old Testament as unbreakable Scripture, the very Word of God. Since many of the problems lie in the Old Testament field, this appeal takes on all the greater significance. The citing of Christ's attitude toward the Old Testament, however, involves a problem of its own. Criticism in the modern sense had not begun. We can hardly say that Jesus' pronouncements on the Old Testament were framed in anticipation of the attacks which would be made on it many hundreds of years later. Consequently, his affirmations on Scripture cannot be invoked with the same force as though the modern issues were in his mind. On the other hand, in view of the perfection of his humanity and the fullness of his wisdom, we rightfully expect that his comments on the Old Testament are fully reliable and like all his words shall never pass away and shall never be outmoded by advancing knowledge.

We turn from our Lord's own testimony to the modern debate over inspiration.

Most writers seem agreed that the modern formulation of the doctrine of verbal inspiration belongs not to the Reformers but to the dogmatists who succeeded them. But certain statements in Luther are quite harmonious with the rigid position of his successors. More recent evangelicals have outlined the requirements of the doctrine of verbal inspiration in somewhat diverse ways. A. A. Hodge and B. B. Warfield, in a joint article, affirmed that, "A proved error in Scripture contradicts not only our doctrine, but the Scripture claims, and therefore its inspiration, in making those claims" (*Presbyterian Review*, Vol. II, p. 245). Francis L. Patton, on the other hand, declared, "It is a hazardous thing to say that being inspired the Bible must be free from error; for then the discovery of a single error would destroy its inspiration. Nor have we any right to substitute the word 'inerrancy' for 'inspiration' in our discussion of the Bible unless we are prepared to show from the teaching of the Bible that inspiration means inerrancy—and that, I think, would be a difficult thing to do" (*Fundamental Christianity*, pp. t63 f.). One must grant that the Bible itself, in advancing its own claim of inspiration, says nothing precise about its inerrancy. This remains a conclusion to which devout minds have come because of the divine character of Scripture. If a person has become convinced by the study of the Word that its majesty and perfection can only be accounted for on the basis that the text was free from error as originally given, such a person ought not to be charged with intellectual dishonesty if he refuses to let perplexing problems in the sacred record move him from this solid conviction. He may feel bound to seek explanation for the problems, and perhaps be dissatisfied with the explanations he receives, yet he continues to rest in his conviction, lest the abandonment of his position mean the forsaking of Scripture as the Word of God.

It is quite possible that one who stands firm in the belief that the Bible,

[p.239]

being God's Word, must be free from error, may count it presumptuous to investigate the tension points very closely. He fears being drawn into the role of a critic of the Word of God instead of being submissive to its pronouncements. He does not deny the function of criticism in a theoretical sense, but practically he is hesitant to employ critical methods in the effort to determine whether or not mistakes do occur. One who follows Dr. Patton's lead is liable to admit the legitimacy of critical investigation but may not care to permit himself to go very far lest the vindication of his own principle of liberty of investigation should turn up difficulties which might embarrass him in continuing to hold a high view of Scripture. Consequently, it has been left largely to so-called liberals to expose and press the problems. It would seem that the only healthy attitude for conservatives is to welcome criticism and be willing to join in it. No view of Scripture can indefinitely be sustained if it runs counter to the facts. That the Bible claims inspiration is patent. The problem is to define the nature of that inspiration in the light of the phenomena contained therein.

Let no one imagine it is an easy task. Can we expect agreement, for example, on what constitutes error? The scientific age in which we live has put a premium upon precise accuracy. Must we impose our standard on an ancient Book? We think we know what truth is. The chances are we are thinking in Hellenistic terms, identifying truth with what corresponds to reality. But the writers of Scripture were not as greatly influenced by this conception of truth as by the Hebrew conception which identifies as truth what corresponds to the nature and purpose of God. Sin is truth if the one standard is applied, for sin is certainly real. But it cannot be truth in the higher sense of being in accord with the nature and purpose of God. The

annalistic accounts of the kings of Judah found in the books of Kings take us into the realm of history as ordinarily understood. Here the customary standard of truth may fairly be applied. But in Chronicles the same period is presented from quite a different standpoint. The concept of God's covenant mercy mediated through David and his house dominates the treatment of the history. It is more internal than external. How can we say that one is more true than the other?

## I. THE TEXT OF SCRIPTURE

Are we justified in appealing from our present text to supposedly infallible originals? Such a procedure is sometimes ridiculed on the ground that no one living has ever seen such infallible originals. True enough. But as Dr. Carl Henry once observed, no one has seen the fallible originals either. The one is as much a presupposition as the other.

But is inspiration not jeopardized by uncertainties about the proper reading to be followed in some passages? When it is alleged that there are thousands of variant readings, this situation can be made to sound well-nigh

[p.240]

hopeless. Differences in the several English versions which have succeeded one another during the last 350 years reflect changes made in the Greek text by modern editors on the basis of manuscript discovery. But an elementary fact remains. There is a text of Scripture. The Bible is not an undefined literature which has attained its form by some hit-or-miss process, and which ought now to be completely remade by admitting a flood of variant readings. The vast bulk of the Word of God is not affected by variations of text at all. Many of the variants concern differences in spelling only. Others can be readily accounted for as scribal embellishment. It is true that as the wealth of materials increases, the task of certifying the proper reading in a given instance may be made more difficult. Yet, despite all this, comparatively little alteration in the text may be looked for in days to come.

The real problem for textual criticism lies in the difficulty of working back to the autographs. The pre-Massoretic period in the transmission of the text of the Old Testament and the first hundred years of the history of the New Testament text are the sore spots. The Dead Sea Scrolls of Old Testament books present examples of proto-Massoretic text, proto-Septuagint, and others which do not conform to either type. Perhaps still more ancient texts will some day come to light to aid the process of certifying the wording of Scripture. Meanwhile, we must rest in the fact that whereas copying has created some uncertainties, the great bulk of the Bible remains unchallenged and its spiritual message shines through to the reader undimmed.

## II. CHRONOLOGY

Since the Biblical faith is rooted in the conviction of the activity of God in human history, events gain significance both in themselves and in relation to one another. Therefore the Bible is concerned with chronology. This is a difficult field, even for the specialist, so that agreement has not been attained on all points. But a good example of progress is the work of Edwin R. Thiele on the period of the divided kingdom (*The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, 1951). He summarizes his findings as follows:

When we once accept the premise of an original reckoning of reigns in Israel according to the nonaccession-year system with a later shift to the accession-year method; of the early use in Judah of accession-year reckoning, a shift to the nonaccession-year system, and then a return to the original accession-year method; when we begin the regnal year in Israel with Nisan and with Tishri in Judah; when we take into consideration the existence of a number of coregencies; and when we recognize that at some late date—long after the original records of the kings had been set in order and when the true arrangement of the reigns had been forgotten—certain synchronisms in II Kings 17 and 18 were introduced by some late hand strangely out of harmony with the original pattern of reigns—when all this is understood, we have shown that it becomes possible to set forth an arrangement of reigns for the Hebrew kings in which we

[p.241]

find both internal harmony and agreement with the facts of contemporary history (p. 268).

The findings of this scholar have been widely accepted, and should give encouragement for further progress in other areas of chronological difficulty.

### III. NUMBERS

Are the figures given in the Biblical narrative trustworthy? To begin with, it should readily be granted that some numbers are not intended to be exact. For example, a clan in Israel was called a thousand. This is an arbitrary figure, and it is highly unlikely that it was anything more than an ideal figure—like a regiment which is often not up to full strength.

One of the complaints lodged against the Biblical narrative is that numbers are often exaggerated. For example, it is doubted that the children of Israel could have increased in Egypt to the point that they were a nation to be reckoned with, 600,000 men, besides women and children (Ex. 12:37). It is pointed out that the repressive measures of the Egyptians would have prevented any such increase. But the Scripture attests the futility of the effort to check the growth of the male population (Ex. 1:18) and expressly informs us that the more the children of Israel were oppressed the more they multiplied (Ex. 1:12). It was the enormous growth of the people which caused alarm among the Egyptians and led to harsh treatment (Ex. 1:7-11). If it be insisted that such a large number of people could not have survived the rigors of life in the wilderness, one can agree. The Bible does not assert that Israel maintained itself in the wilderness. Apart from God's supernatural care the sojourn there would have been impossible. If one cannot accept the miraculous he will naturally quibble at the numbers.

Another tension point is the population figures given for the towns captured by Israel at the conquest. The *tels* of these places, as they are examined today by archaeologists, are small and apparently quite incapable of containing such large numbers as the records assign to them. The problem is real. One factor in a possible solution is the fact that such population figures as 12,000 for Ai must surely have included the people who ordinarily dwelt outside the city and carried on agriculture in the surrounding country. They would rally to the city in time of siege.

More perplexing is the conflict in figures found in parallel passages of the same event. Professor H. P. Smith prepared a list of these (*Inspiration and Inerrancy*, pp. 250 f.). For example, it is stated in II Samuel 10:18 that David destroyed of the Syrians 700 chariots. In I Chronicles 19:18 the number is put at 7,000. Dr. Smith proposes that the Chronicler was desirous of enhancing the glory of Israel's golden age, which now lay in the past, and he did this by altering the figures. If so, it is strange that II Chronicles 9:25 should state that Solomon had 4,000 stalls for horses and chariots, whereas the earlier annalistic record of I Kings 4:26 states that he had 40,000 stalls.

[p.242]

The pattern is not consistent. Some have thought that abbreviations were used for figures and that these were sometimes misconstrued by those who used the texts at a later time. No explanation that has been given is entirely satisfactory. Here one must simply confess to having insufficient data for a judgment. It is amusing to note that Dr. Smith's figures do not jibe with the text in the case of II Samuel 10:6, for he lists the men of Tob as 1,200, whereas the text has 12,000—an unwitting lesson to all of us about the difficulty of transcribing numbers precisely.

#### IV. THE GOSPELS

All will agree that the records of our Lord's life and ministry are central to the whole gamut of Scripture. But not all agree that they are trustworthy accounts, in which case they cannot have been inspired of God. One of the most devastating lines of criticism used to question the record is the contention that the tradition has been so thoroughly shaped by the viewpoint and needs of the early Church that we are practically without any reliable means for forming a truly historical picture of what transpired in the life and labors of Christ. This is one of the fruits of an extreme application of the form-criticism method. Granting that the interest of the Church may have been greater in some things that pertained to the tradition than others, because of the bearing on its own situation, this does not mean that the Church altered the tradition. Selection does not mean perversion. The tradition was grounded on the testimony of witnesses, men who had companied with Christ. It would be utterly inconsistent with such witness to alter the tradition, especially when many of these witnesses were still alive and active in the leadership of the Church. The tradition in written form, preserved in the Gospel records, cannot successfully be opposed to the oral tradition which preceded it, as though the tradition had lost its reliability by the time it was inscripturated. The only reason for putting the tradition into written form was to preserve that which had been the oral teaching of the Church from the time of its inception.

The first three Gospels possess certain marked similarities, having considerable material in common and looking at our Lord's ministry from essentially the same perspective. They are therefore called Synoptic Gospels. It is widely agreed today that these accounts make use of sources, whether written or oral or both. Mark is viewed as the basic account, for Matthew and Luke appear to have made liberal use of his narrative.<sup>1</sup> In addition, they utilized other sources. Attempts have been made to show that even Mark is composed from previously

---

<sup>1</sup> For the contrary view questioning the primacy of Mark and supporting the traditional priority of Matthew, see John H. Ludlum Jr.'s two articles on "New Light on the Synoptic Problem" in *Christianity Today*, Nov. 10 and No. 24, 1958.—Ed.

existing sources. All this sounds unbecoming to the notion of inspiration. What room is left for divine action? A moment's

[p.243]

reflection, however, will shed a different light on the situation. The Old Testament which was so heartily endorsed by Christ and so reverently held by the early Church to be the Word of God had already been constructed in part along similar lines, for the use of sources is often indicated throughout the historical books. We have no reason, therefore, to raise any a priori objection to this methodology in the composition of the Gospels.

If the Gospel writers imply their dependence upon one another's work by the similarity of the wording in many places, yes, even identity of wording, they also reveal something of their own reason for writing by the variations of their narrative when touching the same material. They have a special aspect of Christ which they wish to magnify. Or they have in mind a certain type of reader. So, for example, we may instance Luke's words in reporting the cries of the crowd at the triumphal entry of Christ—"Glory in the highest," instead of "Hosanna in the highest" as in the other Gospels. Luke knew that his Gentile readers would be unfamiliar with the word Hosanna, so he did his best to express its meaning in a way which would be intelligible.

Verbal alteration is not an isolated feature, for it occurs also in the parallel accounts of the Old Testament. It is present too in many of the quotations made by New Testament writers from the Old Testament. The more one emphasizes the alterations in the wording of the quotations, the more impossible it becomes to explain these deviations on the basis of carelessness or errancy. Schoolboys could do a better job of mere transcribing than the New Testament writers have sometimes done. It becomes necessary to suppose that a divine power was present in them, leading them in the interest of fulfillment and application to use language which differed at times from that of their Old Testament exemplars.

If the Gospel writers had been interested in presenting records which would meet the test of verbal agreement, they would certainly have labored to harmonize their accounts. There is nothing superficial or flippant about these accounts. Clearly they were written with all soberness and in the consciousness of handling truth. But that truth was capable of multiform expression which gained its unity from its great Subject and from its Author, the Spirit of Truth.

Verbal contradictions do occur in the Gospels. One of the most famous is the "staff" passage which recounts Jesus' directions to the disciples governing their preparation for the preaching tour they were about to undertake. According to Mark 6:8 a staff was permissible, whereas bread, pouch, and copper coins for the girdle were ruled out. The parallel passages in Matthew 10:9 and Luke 9:3 differ in that they include a prohibition of staff as well. Are we to take the common sense approach and say that staff and sandals (which the Markan account also allows) were necessary items, whereas bread and pouch and copper coin contained occasions of temptation to provide for oneself and even store up a supply in advance? If so, then the

[p.244]

other accounts may represent what Swete calls "an early exaggeration of the sternness of the command." Or are we entitled to think that the more sweeping demands of Jesus in the Matthew and Luke accounts better suit the spirit of the narrative, with its note of urgency and complete dependence on God? It is odd that these two should agree together against Mark. Perhaps the text of Mark originally read as they do and it was altered at a very early date. Speculation cannot do much to resolve the riddle. Whatever be the explanation, this sort of thing is rare in the Gospels, for ordinarily they flow along together with only minor changes in terminology which do not materially affect the meaning.

Sometimes one Gospel appears to add to another something which alters the sense. In the report of the Sermon on the Mount, Luke has "Blessed are ye poor," whereas Matthew has "Blessed are the poor in spirit." We need not suppose that Matthew had Luke's text before him and consciously added to it. The saying, as it circulated in the tradition, probably had the form Luke gives it. Matthew's terminology is something of an interpretation which is also in the nature of a safeguard against a misunderstanding of the purport of Jesus' saying. Poverty is not in itself a blessing nor does it by itself convey a spiritual benefit. But redemption history reveals the truth that the poor are apt to be those who, though oppressed by their fellows, commit their case to the Lord and trust in him to vindicate them. They may even have become poor because their piety made them a target of ungodly and unscrupulous men who knew they would not use worldly methods to defend themselves. We should ask ourselves whether it would have been better for Matthew to leave the words of Jesus in the bald form found in the tradition, or whether the addition is not justified both in the mind of Christ and in the verdict of history. There does not appear to be any antecedent reason why interpretation, which is so prominent a part of the epistles of the New Testament where they touch the person and work of Christ, should not also find a place in the records of his life and work which the Gospels afford us. Particularly is this so when it is recalled that the epistles, in greater part at least, preceded the Gospels in order of composition. Their influence on the Gospels in this respect must not be ignored.

No further attention need be given to the factor of verbal differences in parallel accounts, since reason and experience teach us that the same thing can be stated in more than one way without loss of accuracy. Were the accounts slavishly similar, suspicion would be engendered that they had been made to agree out of an ulterior motive to furnish an appearance of harmony which the facts did not warrant.

A question may properly be raised about passages which stand in only one Gospel. This problem does not concern Mark, for practically all of his record reappears in some fashion in Matthew or Luke. But in the latter two Gospels we find not only individual sayings but whole blocks of material which are peculiar to the Gospel concerned. A very radical approach to the

[p.245]

problem might conclude that because these items are not found in the basic Gospel of Mark, they are therefore to be suspected as alien to the original tradition. But on what basis can we judge that Mark is the sum total of legitimate early tradition? The words and deeds of Jesus were far bulkier than any of our Gospels or all of them put together. So, for example, the saying of Jesus in Matthew 16 about the Church has no counterpart in the other Gospels, but it can easily be defended as an authentic saying of Jesus rather than something read back into the tradition from a later time to justify the Church's existence and Peter's prominence in

relation to it. As R. Newton Flew observes, "The Semitic colouring of these verses is unmistakable. The opening beatitude, the designation of Simon by his father's name, the Rabbinic expression of 'binding and loosing,' the eschatological struggle with the powers of the underworld—all these are indications of a primitive origin for the whole paragraph" (*Jesus and His Church*, p. 90).

In an inspired record we might expect to find events recounted in exactly the same order in parallel accounts. This is not the case, although the Synoptic Gospels do preserve a broad pattern of agreement in regard to the movements of Jesus as well as his utterances. But there are exceptions, such as the order of events in the Temptation and Jesus' rejection at Nazareth. This latter item is placed almost at the beginning of the Galilean ministry by Luke. Matthew and Mark have it much later. Generally speaking, there is no such thing as an inspired order of narration. As noted above, one may detect a broad chronological pattern unfolding in the Gospels, but it is obvious that within that framework the writers exercised considerable liberty in the placing of individual elements of the story. They can only be held blameworthy in so doing if they have committed themselves to a strict chronological sequence, and this they have not done.

Are the Gospel writers guilty of accretion? Have they added to the basic tradition imaginative or legendary elements, or have they been influenced to color their accounts by intruding material which derives from early Church usage but which is anachronistic for the period of the Gospels? This problem is another aspect of the comparative study of the Synoptics. To begin with we can rule out any suggestion that the tendency to accretion is such an organic thing that we can trace it through the various stages of the tradition. On the contrary, it is a well-known fact that in repeated instances the accounts which Matthew and Luke present are briefer than the account given in Mark, the basic Gospel. Examples are the story of the woman with an issue of blood, the Gerasene demoniac, John the Baptist's imprisonment, the cure of the epileptic boy. The Gospel writers were not afflicted with a mania to enlarge upon what was commonly received.

Matthew is the one chiefly accused of taking liberties with his material. In certain incidents he introduces two men where the parallel accounts have only one, as in the case of the Gerasene demoniac (Matt. 8:28) and the blind man at Jericho (Matt. 20:30). The animal used at the triumphal

[p.246]

entry has a foal, which is not mentioned in the other accounts (Matt. 21:2-7). But curiously enough, in the story of the resurrection, Matthew, like Mark, notes only one angel at the tomb, whereas Luke refers to two (the same is true in John's account). It would seem impossible, therefore, to find a pattern of accretion that is consistent. One could properly speak of error here if the texts which specify a single participant made it definite that there was one and only one. This is not the case. The possibility of a plurality can then be granted on principle.

An ecclesiastical interest has been detected by many writers in the case of Matthew's Gospel. It is said that the baptismal formula in connection with the Great Commission, to cite one example, is a reflection of the developed usage of the Church at a later time and cannot be attributed to Jesus himself. This sort of criticism is arbitrary. What is the background for such

a trinitarian statement as is contained in the apostolic benediction (II Cor. 13:4) unless it be the very utterance of Jesus referred to by Matthew?

Luke also is characterized by elements not found in the other Synoptic records. We are not thinking of blocks of material peculiar to his Gospel, but of additions where the narrative is held in common by the Synoptists. One example will suffice, the case of the two malefactors crucified with Jesus. Mark and Matthew are content to narrate the fact of the co-crucifixion. Luke alone tells of their conversation with Christ and with one another, climaxed in the repentance and faith of one of them. As a historian who made inquiry about the events of the life of Christ before setting his hand to writing, Luke must have learned of this development and so included it. We can hardly charge a man of his historical judgment with embroidering a story in order to give it greater human interest.

## V. THE FOURTH GOSPEL AND THE SYNOPTICS

John's account of our Lord's ministry follows a path so completely different from the Synoptics that it overlaps in only about ten percent of the material. It makes the ministry longer than the express statements of the other Gospels require, and it locates the scene of Christ's labors preponderantly in Judea rather than in Galilee. Is this historically justified? Since the Gospel materials combined give us only about 30 days of activity, it is evident that the Synoptic tradition is by no means a complete account of our Lord's active ministry. An extensive Judaeian ministry is not out of the question. In fact, it is demanded by the Synoptics themselves, for they present the visit to Jerusalem as involving a verdict of death for Jesus as a fact assured in advance. Only John's Gospel gives us the true explanation for this state of affairs, for it indicates that Jerusalem has had its opportunity to evaluate Jesus and that the decision has been negative. Incidentally, the Synoptics in their own way testify to the presence of Jesus in Judea before the final journey. The story of Martha and Mary is only one example of

[p.247]

several which tend to establish his presence in the vicinity of Jerusalem on more than one occasion prior to the closing days.

A striking feature of John's Gospel is the discourse material. Here Jesus makes no use of the typical parabolic medium of the Synoptics. The addresses are mainly occupied with his own person and credentials. Sometimes they become dialogues between himself and his auditors. In many ways they reveal contrast to the discourses in the other Gospels. It is significant that Jewish scholars have experienced less difficulty in receiving these discourses as authentic than many critics of Christian persuasion, for they recognize how closely they parallel Rabbinic examples. Verbatim reporting was not expected on the part of a faithful disciple as he made available the sayings of his esteemed master. This freedom of expression did not necessarily involve unfaithfulness in the fulfillment of his task.

The basic question which keeps emerging even in the Synoptic report of Jesus' Galilean utterances is the person of Jesus in the sense that the very nature of the teaching involved an assumption of authority which was inseparable from the mystery of his being. In John's Gospel this question is more overtly discussed. The very openness of the discussion may be

explained, at least in part, by the identity of those who heard our Lord. In the main, those who listened to the Johannine discourses were not the simple folk of Galilee but the custodians of Israel's traditions and hopes, the leaders of Jewry. Their position would require them to scrutinize his claims. This can be only a broad generalization, to be sure, for John 6 reports a discourse in which the common people were the auditors, and it is heavily Christocentric in its emphasis.

The cleansing of the temple is given an entirely different location in John than in the Synoptics. Instead of placing it at the close of the ministry, as they do, where it proves to be the event which crystallizes official Jewish opposition and triggers the developments which lead to Jesus' death, John puts it early. And since he has no cleansing of the temple at the close, he substitutes, as some think, the story of the resurrection of Lazarus as the occasion for the action of the Sanhedrin against Jesus. There is no necessity whatsoever for supposing that John invented the story of Lazarus' resurrection in order to provide a basis for official Jewish action against Jesus. The deepening opposition to him, attested both in John and the Synoptics, and the several attempts to capture him or put him to death during the course of his ministry, make it possible for events to have run their course even without a cleansing of the temple during the Passion week. But a proper understanding of the course of events is facilitated when we retain both cleansings. The former one helps to explain the exasperation of the Jewish hierarchy which is noted in connection with every subsequent visit to Jerusalem. It explains, too, why Jesus felt it expedient to leave Judea and pass through Samaria into Galilee, as stated in John 3 and 4. The second cleansing, on the other hand, comes in naturally as the sequel to the triumphal entry and the

[p.248]

prelude to the seizure and trial. Commercial traffic in the temple courts could easily have been revived by the time our Lord came up to Jerusalem for the final visit.

Into the much discussed question of the nature and the time of the Supper mentioned in John 13 in relation to that mentioned in the Synoptics, we do not propose to enter here, except to say that the key may still be missing for the solution of the difficulty. John's references to the Feast as still future from the standpoint of the meal eaten with his disciples (John 13:29; 18:28) may possibly be explained as pointing to the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which was sometimes designated by the term Passover (Luke 22:1). Some have conjectured that John was operating on a different calendar than the Synoptists, perhaps reflecting the calendar dispute which the Qumran community had with official Judaism. More light on this whole problem is urgently needed.

It is our conviction that John wrote with full knowledge of the Synoptic tradition, not to dispute it or displace it, but to build upon it and give it a more definitely theological interpretation than his predecessors had supplied.

## **VI. THE ACTS AND THE EPISTLES**

Opportunity for criticism in this area arises from the fact the same general period is covered by the latter half of Acts and by the epistles of Paul. Acts reports the movements of Paul and the founding of his churches. The epistles reflect Paul's movements to some extent and reveal

his principles and methods. These writings are nearly all accepted as authentic in our time. But a less favorable verdict has often been passed on the book of Acts. A favorite testing point is the council of Jerusalem (Acts 15). Paul reports on his contacts with the Jerusalem church in his epistle to the Galatians, and includes an account of a visit to the holy city over the issue of circumcision as it affected Gentile converts (Gal. 2:1-10). In many ways his account differs from the report of Luke in Acts 15. Among other things, Luke makes much of the decree which was sent to the Gentile churches as a result of the conference. Paul is silent about this. Instead of jumping to radical conclusions about the unreliability of Luke, it is well to reflect how widely two men may differ in their interest even when they are ideologically attuned. Since Luke makes no mention of something very close to Paul's heart, the fund raised by him in his churches for the poor saints at Jerusalem, though he (Luke) gives a rather full report of the journey, including the listing of Paul's traveling companions, and since he has nothing to say about Paul's hope to visit Spain, though this was strongly in the apostle's mind and Luke must have known of it because of his close association with the apostle, it is then quite possible for him to emphasize a feature of the Jerusalem council, namely the decree, which did not bulk nearly as large in the thinking of Paul and therefore found no place in his letter to the Galatians.

[p.249]

## **VII. ERROR IN SOURCES?**

We venture to embark on a delicate question which is involved in our general discussion. Does inspiration require that a Biblical writer should be preserved from error in the use of sources? Presumably when Stephen asserted that Abraham left Haran for Canaan after his father's death (Acts 7:4), he was following a type of Septuagintal text such as Philo used, for the latter has the same statement (*Migration of Abraham*, 177). The Hebrew text of Genesis will not permit this, since the figures given in Genesis 11:26, 32 and 12:4 demand that Terah continued to live for 60 years after Abraham left Haran. A similar approach may be made to the problem of Matthew's citation of Zechariah 11:12, 13 as though it were from Jeremiah (Matt. 27:9). No doubt other explanations are possible here, but we can understand that if this passage in Zechariah had already been associated with the name of Jeremiah in Jewish tradition, Matthew might readily fall into line with this practice. We are not affirming that this is a dogmatic requirement, but if the inductive study of the Bible reveals enough examples of this sort of thing to make the conclusion probable, then we shall have to hold the doctrine of inspiration in this light. We may have our own ideas as to how God should have inspired the Word, but it is more profitable to learn, if we can, how he has actually inspired it.

## **VIII. ETHICAL HARMONY?**

To some minds the historical problems which tend to plague the defenders of inspiration are less important than the conflict in theological position which they find here and there in the Scriptures. A prime case is the contrary statement of II Samuel 24:1 and that of I Chronicles 21:1. The former passage states that the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel and he incited David to number the people. This act brought divine retribution which the chapter describes. In Chronicles, on the other hand, it is stated that Satan rose up against Israel, inciting David to number Israel. Are we to think that the writer of Chronicles revolted against the idea that God would incite David to do something which would bring death to thousands of his subjects, so he changed his source to read Satan instead of God? This does not get us

very far. Surely the Chronicler held a sufficiently high view of God that he would grant the divine awareness that Satan was inciting David. In that case, should not judgment have fallen on Satan rather than on the people? It seems clear that underlying both accounts is the recognition of the sinfulness of the nation. This is definitely implied in II Samuel 24:1. A nation that would repudiate its king for the usurper Absalom, to mention only one of its blemishes, was not pleasing to God. It is difficult to see any basis here for the thought that God is made to appear a capriciously angry deity, and that the Chronicler tries to get God off the hook by ascribing the

[p.250]

trouble to Satan. God often used Satan and evil influences to bring judgment upon those who had disobeyed him or turned against him (see I Kings 22:19-23).

Another tension point is the divergent treatment of faith and works in Paul and James. Can these be harmonized? James 2:24 contains the crux of the discussion. It sounds anti-Pauline if it is allowed to stand in isolation. But the preceding verse demonstrates that for James, as for Paul, there is a justification based on faith alone (cf. Rom. 4:3-5). The point James is making is that true faith involves a manifestation in works. Only as these are present can faith be adjudged genuine. In this Paul concurs (Gal. 5:6). It is not at all clear that James is attacking teaching known to emanate from Paul. Certainly in the James passage there is no reference to works of the law such as Paul rules out in connection with justification. To teach that Paul and James are irreconcilable is not only to fail from the standpoint of penetrating exegesis but also to question the integrity of the honored expositors of the Word who have wrestled with this problem throughout the long history of interpretation and have concluded that the two representations are not fundamentally opposed.

### **Conclusion**

Unquestionably the Bible teaches its own inspiration. It is the Book of God. It does not require us to hold inerrancy, though this is a natural corollary of full inspiration. The phenomena which present difficulties are not to be dismissed or underrated. They have driven many sincere believers in the trustworthiness of the Bible as a spiritual guide to hold a modified position on the non-revelation material. Every man must be persuaded in his own mind. James Orr once wrote, "It remains the fact that the Bible, impartially interpreted and judged, is free from demonstrable error in its statements, and harmonious in its teachings, to a degree that of itself creates an irresistible impression of a supernatural factor in its origin" (*Revelation and Inspiration*, p. 216). In this statement all believers should be able to concur. It is possible that if our knowledge were greater, all seeming difficulties could be swept away.

On an occasion when he was interrogated with respect to a theological problem, Jesus replied, "Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures" (Matt. 22:29). How striking it is that the one allusion to error by our Lord in the days of his flesh was not to something in the Scriptures but to failure to know them and interpret them aright.

[p.406]

A. B. Bruce, C. A. Briggs, L. J. Evans and H. P. Smith, *Inspiration and Inerrancy*. London: James Clarke, 1891.

Everett F. Harrison, "The Phenomena of Scripture," Carl F.H. Henry, ed., *Revelation and the Bible. Contemporary Evangelical Thought*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1958 / London: The Tyndale Press, 1959. pp.237-250.

---

R. Laird Harris, *The Inspiration and Canonicity of the Bible*, pp. 85-128.

Everett F. Harrison, "Criteria of Biblical Inerrancy," in *Christianity Today*, Jan. 20, 1958, pp. 16 ff.

B. B. Warfield, *Revelation and Inspiration*, pp. 169-226, 395-425.

Edward J. Young, *Thy Word is Truth*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1957. Pp. 113-185.

---

© 1958, 1986 Carl F.H. Henry. Reproduced by kind permission of Dr Carol Henry Bates.

Prepared for the Web in April 2009 by Robert I. Bradshaw.

<http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/>

---