

The Inspiration and Authority

of

Scripture

By

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# The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture

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## Its inspiration

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Also; 2 Pe. 1:19-21, Rev. 22:18-19.

## A doctrinal statement on Scripture:

“The Bible is the Word of God. It is inspired and inerrant in its original autographs. It is a complete and final revelation of God.”

## The correct direction

Some years back, I watched a documentary regarding an aircraft which lost its navigation system while on a long night flight in the north of Africa in about the 1950s. The option to land at a small airport was rejected in favour of continuing to their intended destination. The navigator set the course as best he could and was confident that when the sun rose, they would see land marks close to where they needed to land. When the first rays of the sun appeared above the horizon, the cabin crew were shocked. The sun was not supposed to rise in the direction of the port side of the aircraft. They had been travelling most of the night in the wrong direction!

The mistake had serious consequences. They corrected their course, but ran out of fuel and crash-landed in the desert. The copilot died because of a severe bump to the head, and the others suffered much hardship before they were finally rescued. For those who take the wrong course in spiritual matters, the consequences are far more serious. The question regarding the trustworthiness of the Bible is not something that can be ignored. We will now look at how God’s Word came to us.

## Its human agents

God worked through men who wrote down what they were inspired by God to write, but not in such a way as to obliterate the natural writing style of the author. This becomes more obvious when reading scripture in the original language. Paul was a scholar and Peter was a fisherman. Those facts are reflected in their different writing styles.

The use of human agents does not diminish the authority

of scripture. Lets put this in military terms. A high-ranking military officer gives an order. It is typed out by a low ranking person, and then distributed by people of low rank. Then, when for instance, a Sergeant presents the order to men under his command, they obey the order as not coming from the Sergeant, but as coming directly from the high-ranking officer. Likewise, we obey scripture, because it comes from God.

## Scripture authenticated

Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible, known collectively as the Pentateuch. He wrote about himself in the third person as did Julius Caesar when he mentioned himself in the memoirs of his military campaigns. God presented Moses to the people with spectacular signs and wonders. He did this because Moses is the first author of the Bible, and therefore, Moses is foundational to all sixty-six books of the Bible.

“The LORD said to Moses, ‘I am going to come to you in a dense cloud, so that the people will hear me speaking with you and will always put their trust in you....’” (Exodus 19:9).

The people consecrated themselves for two days, then “On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled. Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the LORD descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, the whole mountain trembled violently, and the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder. Then Moses spoke and the voice of God answered him.” (Exodus 19:16-19).

God spoke very loudly. We learn from the book of Hebrews, “At that time his voice shook the earth...” (Heb. 12:26). It was frightening for the people who were not accustomed to loud noises such as screaming jet engines and teenagers with loud amplifiers. The Bible tells us, “Everyone in the camp trembled”.

In addition to the above testimony, God did something very special with Moses; he made his face radiant.

“When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the Testimony in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the LORD. When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, his face was radiant, and they were afraid to come near him.” (Exodus 34:29-30).

To further reinforce the fact that God was communicating his message face to face with Moses, he made his face radiant every time Moses went into the tent and spoke with him. “But whenever he entered the Lord’s presence to speak with him, he removed the veil until he came out. And when he came out and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, they saw that his face was radiant. ...” (Exodus 34:34-35a). Quite clearly, the Israelites would need to be

wilfully rebellious against God to ignore what Moses said and wrote.

Now let's compare the above foundational event with the foundational event of Buddhism. Siddhartha **Gautama** (563-483 BC) the Buddha (Buddha is a title meaning 'enlightened one') sat under a tree and allegedly received a revelation. There was no spectacular sign, just a man sitting under a tree. Furthermore, there was not much to see because the thoughts that came to his mind did so during the hours of darkness.

As for **Mohammed** (c. 570-632 AD), the founder of Islam or Mohammedism as it was often called in its early days. He sat in a cave in a state of meditation at night on Mt Hira where he received thoughts that greatly alarmed him. He thought he was being attacked by a Jinn (evil spirit). Several books speak of the fear he experienced regarding his mental state, including, "*The First Muslim*" by Lesley Hazleton (see page 19).<sup>1</sup> He spoke to his wife (Khadija) about the matter. She convinced him with the help of her aged cousin, Waraqah ibn Nawfal that the thoughts were from God and that he should go back for more. By western standards, women are treated badly by Islam, but where would Islam be without the actions of this woman?

No spectacular signs and wonders accompanied Mohammed's experience on the mountain. The Bible is the only book to be founded with powerful signs and wonders from God.

The powerful work of God on the mountain in support of Moses was witnessed by a whole nation, numbering at least in the tens of thousands. Even though the Scriptures have that great testimony, they have an even greater testimony.

#### **Authenticated by Jesus**

When Jesus walked this earth, he was fully God and fully man. It was in his authoritative position as God and man that he made the statement, "... your word is truth" (John 17:17). God bore testimony to the fact that Jesus is his son, by raising him from the dead "... who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord." (Romans 1:4).

Scripture has two powerful witnesses that it is from God. At the beginning, it has the powerful testimony of the signs and wonders given by God to the whole nation of Israel on Mt Sinai. At the end of the Old Testament, and at the beginning of the new, we have the statement from Jesus who was raised from the dead that God's word 'is truth'. For the moment, let's summarise the above.

- God spoke with Moses and great signs accompanied the event.
- God the Father spoke through Jesus. The Father authenticated everything Jesus did and said by raising him from the dead. This Jesus testified to the truthfulness of Scripture. By contrast:
- Mohammed sat in a cave. No loud voice from God and no spectacular sign accompanied this foundational event for Islam.
- Buddha sat under a tree. No loud voice from God and no spectacular sign accompanied this foundational event for

Buddhism.

#### **Scripture is self-authenticating**

Scripture is not reliant upon the opinions of men or any branch of science to be validated. The fulfilment of statements from God's prophets regarding the future - from their point in time - show that they were inspired of God. For instance, it was predicted that Jesus would go quietly to his death like a lamb to the slaughter (Isaiah 53:7) which is exactly what happened. Furthermore, the Scriptures predicted what would happen to the garments of Jesus after his crucifixion. The soldiers fulfilled Scripture when they said, "'Let's not tear it,' they said to one another. 'Let's decide by lot who will get it.' This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled which said, 'They divided my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.' So this is what the soldiers did.'" (John 19:24). For more information on the fulfilment of Scripture, see my paper, *The Witness Of Prophecy*, a free download from the defenceofthefait.org web site.

#### **The certainty of the fulfilment of Scripture**

"I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished." (Matt. 5:18). See also:

"It is easier for heaven and earth to disappear than for the least stroke of a pen to drop out of the Law." (Luke 16:17).

"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away." (Luke 21:33).

Regarding its endurance: "The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands for ever." (Isaiah 40:8).

#### **False teaching**

Jesus warned the disciples to be on guard against false teaching. In his day, the main threat came from the Pharisees and Sadducees. He said, "'... be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.' Then they understood that he was not telling them to guard against the yeast used in bread, but against the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees." (Matt. 16:11-12). The truth of the Bible has been attacked many times and rebutted. One major attack came at the end of the nineteenth century from a man named Julius Wellhausen.

#### **Julius Wellhausen (1844 - 1918)**

Wellhausen, a German, was a man of great intellect. He went as professor of OT to Griefswald (1872 to 1882) where orthodox Lutherans were alarmed at the doubts he cast on the inspiration of Scripture. He resigned and transferred to the teaching of oriental languages. A Church dictionary says of him, "Building on the work of earlier scholars, he attracted widespread attention by suggesting that the basic document of the Pentateuch ("P") was the youngest rather than the oldest element, and that the development of OT religion became clearer if the Pentateuch were viewed as a composite document. His *History of Israel* (1878; ET 1883) gave him a place in biblical studies comparable, it was said, to that of Darwin in biology."<sup>2</sup>

Wellhausen rejected the time-honoured view held by both Jews and Christians that the Pentateuch (first five books) was written under inspiration of God by Moses. He claimed the Pentateuch is simply a collection of human documents and that the story of Adam and Eve is a myth that can illustrate a few truths.

Until the advent of Wellhausen and the German rationalists, the human intellect was to be placed under the authority and direction of Scripture. His teaching had the effect of placing human reason above Scripture. I suspect that Wellhausen to some extent fell victim to his own great intellect. He may have thought his great brain didn't need to be subject to the Bible. He could instead, be judge of the Bible. Other like-minded intellectuals followed his lead. His life is a warning to others regarding the danger of pride.

Wellhausen and like-minded teachers were influenced by Darwinism (the view that higher forms of life have progressed in form and ability from lower forms of life because of the need to survive; never mind that need has never been demonstrated to be a means of changing the genetic code). Darwinism persists in our schools in spite of the fact that lower forms of life survive quite well, especially the flies, termites, and mosquitoes, much to the annoyance of us humans.

Darwin published his book, "*On The Origin Of Species*" in 1859. In this book, God creating all kinds of living things is replaced by chance random processes and survival of the fittest. Many at the head of big business loved the teaching because it gave legitimacy to their trampling on the opposition and growing bigger at the expense of others. For instance, Rockefeller, who went to Church, but was influenced more by Darwinism than by the Bible in some areas, caused much financial heartache and anguish as he swallowed up smaller oil companies in the expansion his own oil empire in a ruthless manner.

The influence of Darwinism was not limited to biology and business, it also influenced theology as viewed by Wellhausen and those who followed him. The Bible came to be seen as the end result of a somewhat evolutionary progress of ideas from men about God. Not only were various documents said to have been put together by unknown authors, the final writing took place much later than traditionally claimed - later than the prophecies in the writings in many cases, so that the prophecies ceased to be a fore-telling of events to come.

Part of the work of evangelical scholars has been to prove the early authorship of the books of the Bible. Archeological diggings proving many of the details in the Bible belong to an early period have helped greatly in that area.

The documentary hypothesis claims four documents make up the Pentateuch. Bible students mostly know the documents (in chronological order) by the letters J, E, D, P:

- **J.** For the document which uses the name Jehovah for God.
- **E.** For the document which uses the name Elohim for God.

- **D.** For the Deuteronomy document.
- **P.** For the Priestly document (allegedly the youngest document).

The documentary hypothesis eventually failed close scrutiny. A close examination of Scripture has found some passages of Scripture which are claimed to have qualities of one particular document are next to a verse which allegedly belongs to another document type. The theory, which initially showed promise in the minds of liberals (those who deny the inspiration of the Bible) to be helpful in the study of Scripture, eventually began to look rather messy as more and more contradictions surfaced. The introduction of the computer into the examination of the hypothesis helped to expose the failure of the theory.

### **Bible Schools and Colleges**

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, many of the theological colleges which were training men for the preaching ministry became liberal in their view of Scripture. That is, they began to accept false views such as the theory of evolution and the Wellhausen hypothesis with the consequence that they no longer considered the Bible to be the inspired word of God.

To counter the poor teaching in the liberal theological colleges, bible schools and colleges were established to train men and women, mainly for lay ministry in the Church and for missionary service.

Liberal theological colleges dealt with issues where the current thinking of the day clashed with the Bible by trying to make the Bible support the current thinking, only to find that ideas had to be changed as current thinking changed. Bible Colleges on the other hand, take the view that the Bible reigns supreme over the opinions of man, therefore its teachings can not be twisted to fit current thinking. History proves this view is correct.

The first Bible School in America was founded by A. Simpson in 1882. Classes were held in a theatre in New York City until the school was moved to Nyack in 1897.

In Australia, the first Bible College was the Sydney Missionary and Bible College, established in 1916 in a period of warfare (WWI 1914-1918). Some detractors did not think it would last because of the war. Thankfully it did last, and I benefited from the sound teaching of the college in 1974-75. Over time, most of the major capital cities in Australia gained a Bible College.

Up to this point, I have mainly dealt with the attack that the Bible has come under from those who do not believe it to be inspired of God. Now I will primarily look at inadequate views of Scripture which have the potential to undermine its respect.

### **Scripture has rank**

If I was addressing a crowd of 1,000 Christians and asked them to put up their hands if they had heard their pastor or Bible teacher bring up the subject of the ranking of scripture. My guess is that few would put their hands up, and yet it is an important doctrine in certain circumstances. Lets

look at this doctrine from both sides.

(a) Scripture does not have rank:

This view looks quite good, after all, it is God who is the ultimate source of every word of the original autographs. If he inspired every one of the original words, then every word must have equal value. If we start placing rank on Scripture, where will it end? We may simply place a low ranking on the passages of Scripture we do not like.

(b) Scripture does have rank:

This view says some passages of Scripture are of higher value or rank than others. At the same time, it affirms the inspiration and authority of Scripture.

When I talk with someone about Scripture having rank, I inevitably get a strange look as though I have gone soft on the inspiration and authority of Scripture. So I usually ask the person if he can quote John 3:16 from memory. The answer so far has always been yes. I then think of an obscure passage such as Leviticus 3:16, and ask him if they can quote it. It is at that point that “the penny drops” - to coin an old phrase. The person may have though he believed all Scripture to be equal, but he had been practising a different belief system.

It may be helpful at this point to ask a related question. Does God rank some doctrines more highly than others?

Fortunately for us, someone asked Jesus this type of question, he said, “‘Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?’” Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” (Matt. 22:36-40).

The first thing we can note is that God *does* rank doctrine. Loving our neighbour is important, but loving God is more important. It ranks above every other teaching. If doctrine has rank, then it follows that passages of Scripture which mention the high ranking doctrines must be ranked highly.

The great reformer, Martin Luther (1483-1546), ranked Scripture according to how clearly it proclaimed Christ. Those passages of Scripture which clearly proclaimed Christ were given the highest ranking. So he, like many Christians today, would have memorised John 3:16.

### The Exodus

In some situations in defence of the Bible, it can be very important to understand that Scripture has rank.

In my early days when leading Bible study groups, I gave some support to the view that the number of Israelites involved in the exodus from Egypt was about 2.5 million. This figure is based on the statement in Numbers which says, “All the Israelites twenty years old or more who were able to serve in Israel’s army were counted according to their families. The total number was **603,550**.” (Numbers 1:45-46, emphasis added). If the number of men in the army is reckoned at being one quarter of the population, then the total number of Israelites is around 2.5 million.

The difficulty with the 2.5 million figure is that it would require a more than tenfold increase in the population for each generation they were in Egypt. They were in Egypt for a period of four generations. The bible says, “In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.” (Gen. 15:16).

For our maths exercise, lets include the men beyond military age and round the number up to a neat 700,000.

Start: 70 males (Gen. 46:27).

1<sup>st</sup> generation 700

2<sup>nd</sup> generation 7,000

3<sup>rd</sup> generation 70,000

4<sup>th</sup> generation 700,000

As can be seen from above, the number 700,000 can only be reached when the male population increases at an impossibly fast rate of 1,000 percent. The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia says of the increase necessary to reach a male population (of military service age) of over 600,000.

“It is also difficult to suppose, on ordinary calculations of the increase of population, that in 430 years (Ex 12:40), or in 215 years as given in the Septuagint, a tribe of 70 males (Gen 46:26 f; Ex 1:5; 6:14) could have increased to 600,000, or even 100,000 men.”<sup>3</sup>

The Encyclopedia Britannica says of the number given in the book of Numbers. “The book opens with a command from God to Moses, early in the second year after the Exodus, to take a census of the arms-bearing men over 20 in each of the clans of Israel. Moses and Aaron, aided by the clan chiefs, take the count, clan by clan, and reach a total of 603,550 men - according to critical scholars, an unbelievably large total for the time and conditions.”<sup>4</sup>

The reasons for my rejection of the 2.5 million figure for the population of Israel at the time of the Exodus are scriptural as well as logical.

### The population of Palestine

The Bible makes the comment that Israel will drive out nations larger than itself (Deut. 4:38). If we take this comment to mean that there are just two nations in Palestine with populations over 2.5 million, that would bring the total inhabitants in Palestine at the time of the Exodus to at least 5 million. When Israel crossed the Jordan, the number would immediately rise to over **seven million**. That number is higher than the population of Israel in 1993, which at that time stood at **5.4 million**.<sup>5</sup> In 1973 it was **3.3 million**.<sup>6</sup>

Regarding the larger nations, the Bible says: “to drive out before you nations greater and stronger than you and to bring you into their land to give it to you for your inheritance, as it is today.” (Deuteronomy 4:38)

Also:

“Hear, O Israel. You are now about to cross the Jordan to go in and dispossess nations greater and stronger than you, with large cities that have walls up to the sky.” (Deut. 9:1).

From the above two passages of Scripture, it is clear that

in estimating the number of Israelites at the time of the Exodus, we need to arrive at a number which is less than half the total population of Palestine at the time. To put the calculation in a different way. To arrive at the total population in Palestine after Israel crossed the Jordan river, it is necessary to multiply the number of Israelites by at least three. But firstly, we need to determine what is a reasonable population at that time.

The time of the Exodus is generally agreed to be in the 15<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> century BC. The populations of countries at that time were less than one tenth of the size today. The aboriginal population of Australia at the time of white settlement in 1788 has been estimated at 200,000 to as high as 300,000. The world population in 2,000 AD was 6,000,000,000. In the time of Christ it was just **138,000,000**.<sup>7</sup> The above figures show that the world population has had a **43.47 fold increase** since the time of Christ. Most of the increase has taken place in the past century.

A further difficulty for the large number given in Numbers is the fact that in another passage in Numbers, we find that Moses counted all of the firstborn males over one month old and arrived at a much smaller, and in the view of many, a more realistic figure. That figure being **22,273**

#### Firstborn counted

“So Moses counted all the firstborn of the Israelites, as the LORD commanded him. The total number of firstborn males a month old or more, listed by name, was 22,273.” (Num. 3:42-43).

From the above figure, we can make a rough calculation of the number of Israelites who took part in the Exodus out of Egypt. If we assume that one male in four is firstborn, then the total male population is 89,092. For one in three, the total is 66,819. The above two figures would put the entire population of Israel at between 133,638 and 178,184 if we assume exactly half the population was female.

The large difference in the numbers between Num. 1:46 and Num. 3:42-43 is not lost on commentators. *The New Bible Commentary Revised* says on Num. 3:42-43, “The number of firstborn, viz. 22,000, seems small in comparison with 1:46 where the males over twenty numbered 603,550. ... In any case the number in 1:46 is uncertain in view of the term ‘thousand’ (see Introduction).”<sup>8</sup>

#### Explanations for the large number

Various ideas have been put forward to account for the large figure given in Numbers 1:46. “Dr. Flinders Petrie has suggested that for “thousand” we should read “families”; but, though the word (*eleph*) sometimes has that meaning (Jdg 6:15; 1 Sam 10:19; 23:23), it is in the singular, and not in the plural, in the passage in question (Ex 12:37).”<sup>9</sup>

#### Corruption of the text

The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia makes the point that, “It should not be forgotten that variations in numbers are very commonly found in various texts, VSS, and parallel passages of the Old Testament. Thus for instance (1 Sam 13:5) the Syriac version reads 3,000 for the 30,000

chariots mentioned in the Hebrew and Greek; and the Septuagint (1 Ki 5:11) gives 20,000 for the 20 measures of oil noticed in the Hebrew text. The probable reason for these discrepancies may be found in the fact that the original documents may have used numeral signs - as did the Egyptians, Assyrians, Hittites and Phoenicians - instead of writing the words in full as they appear in the New Testament. These numeral signs - especially in cuneiform - were apt to be misread, and the sign for “unity” could easily be confused with those denoting “sixty” (the Babylonian unit) and “an hundred” - if, in the latter case, a short stroke was added. In the opinion of the present writer the difficulty is due to a corruption of the original statement, which occurred during the course of some fifteen centuries, or more, of continued recopying; but the reader will no doubt form his own conclusions as to this question.”<sup>10</sup>

#### Some special problems

The New Bible Commentary, under the sub heading, Some Special Problems, makes the following remarks regarding the reliability of some of the numbers in the book of Numbers.

“In the book of Numbers a special usage of the terms ‘thousand’ (Heb. ‘Elep) and ‘hundred’ (Heb. *me a*) is encountered in the census lists of chs. 1-4 and 26, and in the account of the Midianite war in ch. 31. The census list represent an ancient tradition of tribal quotas of men available for war, so that the terms in question signify military units of some kind (cf. 1 Sa. 8:12; 22:7; 2Sa. 18:1 etc). The exact numerical value of the terms is unknown. Alternatively, by vocalizing the consonants; -l-p to read ‘*allup*’ we have the meaning ‘leader’ or ‘captain’. Elsewhere again the term ‘*elep*’ denotes ‘family’ or ‘tent group’ (e.g. Jdg. 6:15; 1Sa. 10:19; Mi. 5:2).

Assuming that the terms in Nu. 1-4; 26 and 31 are military in nature and that the lists are ancient and authentic, it is possible that a late compiler of ancient source material misunderstood the true meaning of the terms and, assuming them to be numbers, simply added them up and arrived at the total 603,550 in 1:46. Or alternatively the term ‘*allup*’, ‘captain’, may have been confused with ‘*elep*’, ‘thousand’, so that, e.g., in 1:39 the 62,700 men of Dan may have read originally ‘60 captains, 2,700 men, or even ‘60 captains, 27 *me ot*’. The problem is thus complex and a variety of mathematical solutions has been offered (e.g. R. E. D. Clark, JTVI, 1955;...)”<sup>11</sup>

#### Doubts

A problem with the very large population figure given in Numbers is that it has led some secular archeologists to the conclusion that the Exodus story is a myth because a population of more than two million moving from Egypt to the promised land would have left behind some evidence of their movement across the land; however, there is no evidence. That problem is solved if the more realistic figure given in Numbers 3:42-43 is accepted.

A similar problem arises if the number of infants slaughtered by Herod in an attempt to kill Jesus Christ is exaggerated. The Bible states, “When Herod realized that he

had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi.” (Matt. 2:16). Some Bible teachers and pastors have claimed that hundreds were slaughtered in this incident without making a thorough check.

Matthew is the only gospel writer to mention the incident. Also, there is no record of the slaughter in secular writing. This has led some Bible critics to claim that Matthew is mistaken with this report. The presenting of a few simple facts will solve this mystery.

The number of infants who could have been killed in this incident was small. Dr William Hendriksen, a highly acclaimed Bible commentator has this to say, “In a town as small as Bethlehem was at that time, even when the immediate surroundings are added as they should be (see 2:16) could the total number of those slain have been more than fifteen or twenty?”<sup>12</sup>

Given the large number of people killed by Roman soldiers on some of their campaigns, it is hardly surprising that the killing of around fifteen or twenty infants did not attract the attention of secular writers. This also partly explains why Matthew is the only gospel writer to comment on the incident. Matthew gives more detail on the early period of the life of Christ than the other gospel writers. He needs to report on the killing to give context to the escape to Egypt (Matt. 2:13-18).

After, the above diversion, we need to consider one more thing about the number of Israelites who left Egypt. Some may wonder why we don't have a couple of clear unambiguous statements on the number of people who took part in the Exodus. I believe that the simple answer is that if the number was particularly important, then God would have given and preserved that number in at least two places in Scripture, but he has not done so for his own particular reasons. Perhaps one lesson out of this is that we should learn to focus on the major points of Scripture and not be overly concerned about the minor details. In other words, pay particular attention to doctrines of highest rank.

We do know that the number God called out of Egypt to witness his miracles and to hear his voice was quite large - numbering at least in the tens of thousands. Much larger than the number of people (1,487) who witnessed the first white settlement of Australia.<sup>13</sup> Only about **1,030** remained to make up the settlement after the supporting ships and crew left.<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, it is much larger than the **104** who took part in, and therefore witnessed the beginnings of the first permanent white settlement of America in 1607.<sup>15</sup>

The number of people who bore witness to the mighty working of God through Moses is far greater, because the events are far more important than the early histories of the US and of Australia, and we ignore them to our peril.

### **Attack by Atheists**

One strategy used by those who attack the Bible is to pick out a passage of Scripture which is of little importance and uncertain, and use it to attack the rest of Scripture. For instance, they may use the case just mentioned and argue that

if this one verse is wrong, how can we trust the rest of Scripture? Those who are unaware that Scripture has rank have difficulty in answering that type of attack.

I will illustrate my point with the army officer again. A high-ranking officer gives an order, it is typed out and passed down the ranks. A low-ranking soldier looks at the order and comments to his friend that the order has a couple of words missing. He suggests they ignore the order based on a couple of words being omitted from the original. His friend then informs him that the order comes from a high-ranking officer, and it is clear what they need to do. They will be in big trouble if they fail to obey the order. The same situation applies to the Bible, its authority can not be overthrown by a small number of copying errors.

There are only a small number of words in the Bible which are uncertain, and Bible scholars know where they are. They are commented on in the margin of all good quality Bibles. The Bible student does not have the liberty to choose for himself which word he can take less seriously.

### **The importance of rank**

It is hard to find an area of study or activity that does not have rank. Even sport has rank. Many a trainer has told a young tennis player for instance, “Keep your eye on the ball”. In maths, it is more important to learn the value of pi to the fourth decimal place (3.1416, rounded up), than to learn the answer to two large numbers multiplied together, e.g.  $357 \times 218 = 77,826$ .

Theology would be very difficult to make sense of if various doctrines did not have rank. We have already seen that the doctrine of highest rank is to love God. By contrast, lets look at a couple of statements in Scripture of low rank.

### **Joseph's coat**

The meaning of the Hebrew word describing the type of robe Joseph wore is unclear. It could have been multi coloured, ornamental or long-sleeved.<sup>16</sup>

The King James Version of the Bible (first published in 1611) says Joseph's robe was multi coloured. “Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of many colours.” (Gen. 37:3, KJV). The New International Version (first published in 1978) says, “...he made a richly ornamented robe for him.” (Gen. 37:3, NIV). I will mention one more uncertain passage.

### **Ravens were commanded to feed Elijah. 1 Kings 17**

“You will drink from the brook, and I have ordered the ravens to feed you there.” So he did what the LORD had told him. He went to the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan, and stayed there. The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the brook.” (1 Kings 17:4-6).

Some years back, I read an article which focussed on an archeological discovery of a group of people in Israel who had a name which is similar to the Hebrew word which we have translated ‘Raven’. A suggestion in the report is that God told this group of people to feed Elijah. Translators have assumed

the word translated 'raven' refers to the feathered variety.

The point I want to make here is that this incident is not important doctrinally. I am not going to lose sleep if it becomes officially confirmed that the ravens who fed Elijah were people and not birds. The lesson we should learn from the above two passages is that we should keep focussed on important matters and not be distracted by the minor.

Jesus complained about the lack of priority of the Pharisees and teachers of the law. He said, "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices - mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law - justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel." (Matt. 23:23-24).

In another passage regarding rank, we are told, "And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love." (1 Corinthians 13:13). From here we now move to another important truth. That being, God is economical with his revelations.

### **Economical with revelations**

All around the world, parents might say to their child, "I have told you once, and I am not going to tell you again" or something similar. In such instances, the parent is being economical with his or her revelation to the child regarding what should be done. Likewise, God is economical with regard to his revelation to his people. There is just one Mt Sinai type of revelation. God does not keep repeating himself to those who choose to be deaf to his voice.

When the people of Israel made an idol in the form of a golden calf, God did not give them another revelation on another mountain; he gave them punishment. "And the LORD struck the people with a plague because of what they did with the calf Aaron had made." (Exodus 32:35).

An incident recorded in 1 Kings chapter thirteen serves as a warning that a clear revelation from the Lord, once given, must be obeyed. A prophet was told by God to go to an altar at Bethel and deliver a message which King Jeroboam heard. The king was angered by the message and commanded those with him to seize the prophet, but God afflicted the arm of the king which was stretched out toward the prophet so that he could not draw it back to his side (13:1-4).

The king asked the prophet to call upon God to restore his arm. The prophet did so, and the king's arm was restored. Out of gratitude, the king said, "'Come home with me and have something to eat, and I will give you a gift.' But the man of God answered the king, 'Even if you were to give me half your possessions, I would not go with you, nor would I eat bread or drink water here. For I was commanded by the word of the LORD: 'You must not eat bread or drink water or return by the way you came.'" (13:7-9).

An old prophet in Bethel was informed by his sons about the dramatic events which had taken place. He then rode on an ass in search of the prophet and caught up with him. When the old prophet extended an invitation to the man of God to come and receive some hospitality, the invitation was declined on the ground that he was forbidden by God to eat or drink in

that place. But, "'The old prophet answered, "I too am a prophet, as you are. And an angel said to me by the word of the LORD: 'Bring him back with you to your house so that he may eat bread and drink water.' (But he was lying to him.)"' (13:18). The man of God went back and ate and drank with the old prophet. Afterwards, judgment was pronounced against the man of God that he would not return home. When he tried to return home, he was killed by a lion (13:24). The man, instead of keeping the word of God, was distracted by another man to follow a false message, and suffered the consequences.

In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, the rich man calls out from Hell to Abraham, "... 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.' 'No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'" (Luke 16:27-31).

From this passage, it becomes clear that the Bible is a complete thorough and sufficient revelation. The reason for not believing, lies at the feet of the person who refuses to believe.

Because God is economical with his revelation to mankind, we need a self-imposed vigilance against moving away from the teachings of Scripture.

Terrible history forgotten can mean terrible history repeated. The false teaching of the documentary hypothesis has had a damaging influence on trust in the Bible for many, but there are other negative influences as well.

- A false view of history.
- pseudoscience (false science).
- Subjectivism, existentialism and post modernism.

### **Historical attack**

Some in the past have made the claim that the Bible can not be accurate because it mentions King Sargon (Isaiah 22:1), and there was no archeological evidence that he ever existed. Eventually, archeological evidence came to light which showed he was a genuine king who was quite powerful in his time. He ruled Assyria from 722-705 BC.

### **Ideas of the day from science**

Some try to blend the latest scientific thinking with the Bible. Modern science informs us that some distant galaxies are millions of light years away. That means light, which travels at 299,792.458 Kilometres per second in a vacuum would take millions of years to reach us under present conditions. If that is the case, then the first chapter of the Bible must be wrong, with the clear implication that other chapters could be wrong.

The trouble here is that people can let their limited understanding of how God did things be their guide as to how much they should trust the Bible. Some scientists now know



how light got here from vast distances in less than 6,000 years.

The problem was solved as a result of Dr John Hartnett working on another problem. That problem being, why is the temperature throughout the observable universe the same in all directions? According to cosmologists who hold to the 'Big Bang' model for the creation of the universe, there should be hot spots left over from the 'Big Bang'. Even if the false idea that the 'Big Bang' occurred 13.7 billion years ago is accepted, there is not enough time for heat to travel from one side of the universe to the other to even out - give an even distribution of heat. This problem puzzled scientists. Christians scientists had a related problem. How can light from distant regions of the universe reach us when the universe is less than 10,000 years old?

The answer lies in the fact that the laws of the universe as we experience them are distorted under extreme conditions such as the expansion of the universe. Einstein's theory of relativity shows that for an object travelling at a very high velocity, time is slower than for a stationary object. An examination of many distant stars has revealed that they are travelling near the speed of light. That means, for the rapidly moving stars, time is moving very slowly. With time moving very slowly on the rapidly moving stars, there is plenty of time for heat to move across the entire universe and even out. It also means there is enough time in space for light to travel through billions of years to Earth, while Earth is less than 10,000 years old.

The Bible does not support the 'Big Bang' theory, but it does tell us in several places that God stretched out the heavens. For instance, "It is I who made the earth and created mankind upon it. My own hands stretched out the heavens; I marshalled their starry hosts." (Isaiah 45:12). See also 42:5, 44:24, 51:13, Jer. 10:12, 51:15.

Those who want to find out why we can see distant galaxies should read, "Starlight, Time and the New Physics" by Dr John Hartnett. The book can be understood by the intelligent reader. A bonus for those who have a degree in maths are the few pages of mathematical equations at the end of the book which prove the author's claims. To find out more, see [www.creationon.com](http://www.creationon.com) and enter author or title in the search box.

The above serves as a warning. Those who use current ideas about science as their starting point instead of the Bible will find that they will have to constantly change their ideas.

### **Subjectivism**

Subjectivism, existentialism, mysticism and postmodernism all denigrate in their own way the significance of objective truth. The postmodernist might say for instance, "That might be true for you, but it is not true for me." The Bible on the other hand tells us that Jesus died, rose from the grave, showed himself to be alive to many witnesses (1 Cor. 15:1-8). He ascended into Heaven to the Father and will return to judge the world (Acts 1:11). Whether the postmodernist likes it or not, the death and resurrection of Christ has severe implications for his life. No one escapes the effect of that historical event.

The lack of regard for the Bible and objective truth is not limited to those outside of the Church. Some branches of the

Church have been badly effected by a 'feel good' mentality. Consequently, they work hard on making people feel good at the expense of real spiritual growth.

### **Pentecostal extremes**

The 1970s and 80s was a period of many Pentecostal excesses. Many were of the view that God was directing their life in every little thing, and that He was working even more powerfully in the preacher, so that the preacher in some instances, merely had to suggest that the Spirit of God was on him in a special way, and people would happily swallow everything he said. Under this type of thinking, the objective word of God is replaced by subjectivism. That is; if it feels right, then it must be right.

I have come across instances of preachers appearing on TV who were influenced by the thinking that the Spirit of God will guide their preaching even if they put little or no effort into the study of his Word. What usually results is a message of little substance, and one which exalts the preacher instead of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The blind trust in the supposedly "Spirit led preachers" began to fade when it became clear that some prominent Pentecostal preachers were following their own lusts instead of the Spirit of God. I am referring here to the moral failings of Gorman, Jimmy Baker and Jimmy Swaggart in the 1980s.

Many who followed the "Spirit led preachers" also followed the weak and false doctrines they proclaimed with sad consequences for their lives. Doctrine must be tested against the Word of God and not taken out of context.

I know of people who have decided on a Church using the wrong criteria. The music is wonderful, the people are friendly and they are promising a lot regarding the spiritual advancement of the Church. They painfully realise later they are caught in a sect teaching false doctrines. They have spent years not truly growing, and family relationships become strained or torn apart over the false teachings.

Some Churches do not teach doctrine at all. They have swallowed the lie that doctrine does not matter. Spiritual growth can not take place apart from understanding the truth. Jesus said, "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth." (John 17:17). Sanctification is the process by which we gradually give up our own selfish way of thinking and adopt more and more God's way of thinking. The chief way in which this process is achieved is by studying the Bible.

### **Read the Bible, but which version?**

I will begin this section with the story of a man who was converted in his mid twenties. He got into a conversation with two Christian friends with whom he was staying. When the subject of Christianity came up, his two friends took hold of a Children's Bible and showed him the pictures as they related to him Old Testament events. They came to the pictures of Jesus on the cross and the empty tomb. Those events were explained to him and he placed his faith in Christ.

The actions of the two Christian men were quite wise. The recipient of their message was not a child in years, but he was a child in his understanding of Bible history.

I tell the above story because I have come across people

who advocate versions which are at the more difficult end of the readability spectrum, without considering the reader. Christians who were converted late in life may have little appreciation of the struggles a young person has when reading the Scriptures in some versions.

When I was in Sunday School, I was given a copy of the King James Version of the Bible (the commonly used 1769 Oxford Standard Edition). I rarely read it outside of the Sunday School class. Even after my conversion at the age of twelve, it was not extensively read.

While in my mid to late teens, my grandfather gave me a copy of the New Testament which was easy to read, *'Today's English Version'* (published in 1966). It was a delight to read. I read it from cover to cover. Because of the pencil sketches of various scenes throughout, it was easy as a beginner to find favourite passages. Some don't like drawings, even in a teenager's Bible. They might like to consider the fact that chapters and verses were not in the original manuscripts.

Chapters were added in the thirteenth century. The work "... is ascribed to Cardinal Hugo de St Caro (died 1248); by others to Stephen Langton, archbishop of Canterbury (died 1227)." Verses "... first appear in the New Testament in Robert Stephens' edition of the Greek Testament in 1551."<sup>17</sup> That is why there are no references to them in the NT. See for instance Matt. 3:3. Chapters and verses were not always put in the best places. See for instance Matthew 11:1-2. The chapter should begin at verse two. In Acts twenty-two, the next chapter could arguably begin at verse thirty.

Regarding the matter of the best Bible version for you, it is best to start with a Bible that is easy to read, such as *'Today's English Version'* or the highly regarded and accepted *'New International Version'*. The use of a good Bible Commentary will help with difficult passages. When you have read through the Bible from cover to cover, begin again, but consider reading a different version.

A small number of Christians claim the KJV is the most accurate version. However, a study of ancient Greek manuscripts shows that the New Testament was written in the language of the people. The writers did not use expressions that had gone out of use in the previous two hundred years. The King James Version by contrast uses ancient expressions. It also uses considerable poetic licence when it says, "The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth." (Matt. 27:44). The words, "cast the same in his teeth" are not found in any ancient text. For more information on errors in the King James Version, see my paper on the King James Version debate available from my web site listed below.

### **Growing a strong Church**

A Church can't grow without a thorough appreciation and use of God's word. It is the fuel which fans the flames of faith. When the Bible has come under attack in the past, the most effective means of defence has been simply to expose the lies that seek to undermine trust.

Some churches, in an attempt to gain strength, can revert to a type of legalism. I know of a church in a hot region of

Queensland which forbade their men from wearing shorts. Some insist on adherence to certain minor doctrines. Some seek conformity to the use of a particular version of the Bible. While many such measures may be of help in the area of self discipline, they do not replace a thorough study of, and obedience to the Word of God.

### **Lessons from German history**

Germany was at the forefront of the rejection of the inspiration of Scripture. So did the lack of respect for Scripture help the German Church and the nation as a whole? The historical evidence is that it did not. The new way of thinking did not produce any great evangelists of the calibre of George Whitefield, John Wesley, Dwight L Moody or Billy Graham. It certainly did not breathe new life into the Churches, in fact, the very opposite occurred.

The weak Church in Germany could not help the country in its hour of need. As Hitler was rising in power, he was being promoted to an almost god-like position in the minds of many. A promotion of any man to that type of position would have raised alarm bells in a healthy Christian nation, but sadly, Germany was not a healthy Christian nation.

The voices raising concerns were very few. One such voice was Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-45). He partly expressed his concerns in a radio broadcast, but before he could complete his message, he was disconnected.

Germany as a whole, rejected Jesus Christ and chose someone completely different - Hitler. Hitler led Germany into many atrocities. The terrible holocaust cost the lives of millions of Jews. Where were the cries from the Church while all of this was going on? It was weak because it had departed to a large extent from the Bible.

Eventually, nations with stronger Christian Churches defeated Germany, but the cost of the war was high on both sides. Germany in particular suffered a high loss of life, much material damage, and the division of its nation from 1945 to 1989.

### **A different story**

While it is true that liberalism brings death, it is also true that a healthy respect for Scripture brings life. *Reformation Today* magazine reports that the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary has gone through an upgrade out of liberalism in recent times. It states, "This came about under the leadership of Albert Mohler Jr. Who was only 33 when he was appointed to the presidency of Southern Seminary. Mohler began a purge at Southern. The liberals were outraged and predicted the demise of Southern ... This dire prophecy proved false. Southern with 4,300 students is now the largest seminary in America."<sup>18</sup>

### **The Word of God is pure**

"And the words of the LORD are flawless, like silver refined in a furnace of clay, purified seven times." (Psalm 12:6).

An error of some who hold to the view that only the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible should be read comes out of the idea that there is just one set of words in

English which can be declared to be the 'Word of God'. Any deviation from a certain set of words (KJV words) is viewed as deviating from the Work of God. The error leaves the enemy with the opportunity to find just one word wrong, and according to the above faulty thinking, the Word of God is not pure. Good statements of faith on Scripture point to the *original autographs* as being without error, not this or that English version.

"The Bible is the Word of God. It is inspired and inerrant in its original autographs. It is a complete and final revelation of God."

### Summary

The Bible is inspired of God, it is authoritative, it is self authenticating, it is clear on all matters of faith and practice. It is ageless in its message, not needing adjustment from time to time as do the opinions of men.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, large numbers of people who were reading their Bibles in the King James Version drifted away from a sound faith under the influence of Julius Wellhausen and his false ideas. They did so, not because of a problem with the translation they were using, but because they rejected the message which is the same in all good versions.

The message of the Bible:

- The message of the Bible is faultless and unchanging.
- **Unchanging.** It is the same yesterday, today and forever.
- It is **unparalleled.** No other message equals the Bible message.
- It is **powerful.** It is the means by which the spiritually dead are brought to life.
- It is **transforming.** It convicts of wrong-doing and encourages good works.
- It both **unites and divides.** It unites those who were once sinners to the fellowship of the saints. More importantly, it divides from the Devil and his kingdom of darkness, and unites to God and his kingdom of light.
- Brings **close fellowship.** To those who heed its message, it brings about a close fellowship with God.

A famous man had a message in his Bible which read:

"This book will keep you from sin, or sin will keep you from this book"

Its message matters. Those who heed its message will be blessed in this life and in the age to come. Conversely, those who reject its message suffer loss, both in this life and the age to come.

"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path."  
(Psalm 119:105).

### Key passages on Scripture

2 Timothy 3:16

"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness."

2 Timothy 2:15

"Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth."

Hebrews 4:12

"For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."

Matt. 24:35

"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away."

Isaiah 40:8

"The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands for ever."

John 17:17

"Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth."

Jeremiah 30:2

"This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'Write in a book all the words I have spoken to you.'"

Psalms 99:7

"He spoke to them from the pillar of cloud; they kept his statutes and the decrees he gave them."

Psalms 119:105

"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path."

Colossians 3:16

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God."

Acts 17:11

"Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true."

Exodus 19:9

"The Lord said to Moses, 'I am going to come to you in a dense cloud, so that people will hear me speaking with you and will always put their trust in you. ...'"

This verse points to that great event on Mt Sinai which is foundational to our respect for Scripture.

Psalms 12:6 "And the words of the LORD are flawless, like silver refined in a furnace of clay, purified seven times."

## End Notes

1. *The First Muslim* is available in digital format. See also, *What Every Christian Needs To Know About The Qur'an*, by James R White, p. 24.
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13. First Fleet, "*The Australian Encyclopedia*", Australian Geographic Society, Terry Hills 2084, 1988, Vol. 4, p. 1,255.
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15. J.E.S., "*Archaeology*", New York, November-December 96, p. 19.
16. M. Kline, *The New Bible Commentary Revised*, Editors Guthrie, Motyer, Stibbs and Wiseman, IVP, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. 1970, p. 107.
17. Bible, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, Gen. Ed. James Orr, Eerdmans, Michigan, 1956, Vol. 1, p. 469.
18. Erroll Hulse, *Reformation Today*, No. 226, November - December 2008, p. 36-37.

## Recommended Reading

*The Witness of Prophecy.*

*The King James Version Challenged:* a critical look at the claim that the King James Version is the most accurate version.

*The Witness of Prophecy* brings before the reader some of the amazing prophecies which are fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

The critique on the King James Version reveals the history behind the KJV and the modern versions. Helpful for those wanting to make an informed decision as to which translation is best for them.

The above booklets are a free download from the [defenceofthefait.org](http://defenceofthefait.org) web site.

*The First Muslim* by Lesley Hazleton. This book, as the name suggests, focuses on the life of Mohammed. It reveals on page nineteen something of the fact that when Mohammed gained his first revelation in a cave one night, he was so troubled by his experience with what he thought was a Jinn (evil spirit) that he contemplated suicide to end the terrible mental state he was in. This book is available in digital format. The first chapter can be downloaded as a free sample, with the option to purchase if you enjoy the read.

The above point on Mohammed's revelation is made in several books, including *The World's Religions*, Edited by J.N.D Anderson (Eerdmans Publishing) 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. 1955, p. 55.

*The Case For Faith* by Lee Strobel.

*The Case For Christ* by Lee Strobel.

*More Than A Carpenter* by Sean McDowell.

*Evidence That Demands A Verdict*, by Josh McDowell.

*Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible*, by John W. Haley.

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