



An Introduction to the BIBLE

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INTRODUCTION TO THE BIBLE

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BOOK OF BOOKS

Chapter 1

It is a commonly accepted fact that the Bible is the most widely read book in the world. It is a very ancient book, the influence of which on the course of human history and civilization has been tremendous. The extent to which it has influenced the lives of men and the destinies of nations is marvelous. Almost all the major events of history have had something to do with it, directly or indirectly. The establishment of the Holy Roman Empire, the wars known as the Crusades¹, wars fought in the age of Reformation, the banishment of the Jews from their homeland in the first century, their dispersion throughout the world and their return to that land in the 20th century, the spread of the ideas of liberty, equality and fraternity that have inspired the revolutionaries and social reformers of all ages, the eradication of great evils such as cannibalism and human sacrifice, the abolition of slavery, the uni-

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1. It is not meant here that the influence of the Bible was responsible for the Crusades or any other wars. Christianity does not approve of people fighting and killing one another. However, it is true that people have fought and killed one another in its name too, as in the names of many other things. It was the nominal conversion to Christianity of several war-like nations in Europe that occasioned the Crusades which were wars aimed at liberating Palestine from Muslim domination. The people who fought wars in the name of defending Christianity in the age of Reformation too, were men motivated by unchristian ideals. Thousands of real Christians in that period were persecuted and killed by those who claimed to be fighting for Christianity.

versal spread of education, the development of languages and literature, the establishment of humanitarian agencies such as the Red Cross - all these reveal the great influence in one way or another, of this wonderful book upon the human society. There is no other book the influence of which on our civilization is so vast, so great and so permanent; its importance is inestimable.

Uniqueness of the Bible

The theme of the Bible is man's destiny in the light of his relationship with God, his Creator. It tells us about the creation of the Universe, the earth and all living beings on it, the existence of Satan the source of all evil in the world, his success in bringing the yoke of sin upon the human race, the eternal punishment for sin, God's love for man, the redemption of the human race through Jesus Christ, the ultimate victory of God over Satan, the wiping out of sin and death from the universe and the establishment of eternal peace, joy and happiness. There is no other book the scope of which is so immense and so great; its subject matter connects the present with the eternity of the past and the eternity of the future; it deals not only with the whole world, but with the whole universe; the words it contains are relevant to the whole of limitless space and the past, present and future of limitless time. It is beyond all doubt that this is a unique book which deserves our careful study.

Books of the Bible

The Bible is a book of books, in the sense that it consists of sixty six books which are divided into two sections namely the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament was written by the prophets who lived before the birth of Jesus and the New Testament was written by the apostles of Jesus Christ during the first century. The Old Testament consisting of 39 books form the sacred scriptures of the Jews; it was with great zeal that they preserved the sanctity of their scriptures throughout the centuries. They wanted to be very faithful in obeying God's commandment: "You shall not add to the Word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you" (Deut 4:2) and "whatever I command you, you shall be careful to do; you shall not add to, nor take away from it" (Deut: 12:32). Thus we have been able to get a flawless Text of the Old Testament from the Jews. This, along with the writings of the apostles of Jesus is the Bible as we have it today.

The first five books of the Old Testament namely Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy are believed to have been written by the great prophet Moses. The verse, "And it came about, when Moses finished writing the words of this law in a book until they were complete" (Deut 31:24) strongly supports this traditional belief. However we have to understand that Moses' authorship of these books does not mean that every word of all

these books was written by him. It is quite reasonable to assume that the account of Moses' death found at the end of Deuteronomy was written by the next writer of the sacred scriptures and added to what Moses had written. The authorship of some books of the Old Testament is not known to us; but their style and contents and the fact that the Jews never questioned their authenticity as part of their sacred writings are sufficient justification for their inclusion in the scriptures. With regard to the scriptures we have to understand that their authenticity as the word of God is what matters and not their human authorship. So the fact that the authorship of some books in the Bible is not known to us is not of much relevance. There is enough proof in the New Testament which makes it clear that Jesus and the apostles considered the whole of the Old Testament as the divinely inspired Word of God. That is why we come across in the New Testament about 300 quotations from the different books of the Old Testament.

The Apocrypha

This is the name given to certain books which are not considered part of the scriptures by the Jews and all Christians except Roman Catholics. The Roman Catholic church considers this as part of the Word of God. These books mostly of unknown authorship and originated during the period of the three centuries before the birth of Jesus, were added to the Septuagint which was the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament. This translation was made by seventy Jewish Scholars at the request of Ptolemy

Philadelphus (285-247 BC). That was how their translation came to be called 'Septuagint'. Being of great literary and moral value the Apocryphal books were given much greater importance than ordinary works of literature. That might have been the reason why they were added to the Greek translation of the scriptures. Though the Jews of Jesus' day were familiar with these books they did not consider them part of the divinely inspired Word. The Jews of the subsequent generations too have refused to give them any importance beyond that of literary works. Though Jesus and His apostles quoted about three hundred passages from the Old Testament, they did not quote even a single passage from these Apocryphal books. This proves that Jesus and His disciples considered the Jewish Old Testament the divinely inspired word of God, but they did not consider the Apocrypha as part of the Scriptures. This is the reason why it is generally accepted by scholars that the Apocrypha is not part of the Holy Bible.

The New Testament

The New Testament of the Bible consists of 27 books. They were written by the apostles of Jesus Christ in accordance with the commandment he gave them just before His ascension: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20). It was the duty of the apostles to teach all the commandments of Jesus to

all the people of all ages in all parts of the world. In order to be able to do this, it was necessary to put down in writing what they had learnt from their Lord. Accordingly they wrote the four Gospels, the book of Acts, the various Epistles and finally, the book of Revelation. In these books there is enough evidence that establishes the Apostles' authority to write them and make them part of the Holy Scriptures along with the Old Testament. The verses, "And for this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received from us the word of God's message, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe" (I Thessalonians 2:13); "For you know what commandments we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus" (I Thessalonians 4:2) and "just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the scriptures, to their own destruction" (II Peter 3:15-16) clearly point out that the writings of the apostles were to be considered as the Word of God in the same manner as the Old Testament writings. The verses, "I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to them, God shall add to him the plagues which are written in this book", in the last chapter of the last book of the New Testament put a seal on the writing of this Great Book that began around 1500 BC and continued through the centuries until it was completed in A.D. 96, with the closing

benediction, “He who testifies to these things says, ‘Yes, I am coming quickly’. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you all. Amen”. (Rev. 22:20-21).

Organic Unity

Perhaps the most important characteristic of the Bible is its organic unity. A contrast between the first book of the Old Testament and the last book of the New Testament reveals that the writing of the sixty six books of the Bible lasting about 1600 years and involving more than forty writers of different nationalities, languages and historical periods who hardly knew one another, was a continuous activity carefully planned and carried out by One who is omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent. The books describe the gradual unfolding of a long and great story spread over the past, present and future and the whole universe. It records in the first book Genesis, the words of a great curse caused by Man’s sin, “Cursed is the ground because of you” (Gen: 3:17) and in the last book, Revelation, we find the words proclaiming the removal of that curse, “There shall no longer be any curse” (Rev: 22:3). It is the long process of the successful removal of the curse mentioned in Genesis that is described in the intervening books. In Genesis we find sin and its consequence death entering the world; in Revelation we see sin and death disappearing for ever from the world and this universe; the books in between describe how sin and death are conquered. The books as a whole narrate the story of the origin of the human race, the tragedy of sin that

overtook it and the miraculous redemption offered to it by its Creator. In a sense this is the story of a great Liberation Movement, planned by God before the creation of the universe, started with the entrance of sin into this world and has continued ever since and is moving towards successful conclusion in the near future. The organic unity of the sixty six books describing this long story is noteworthy. In every one of them we find the author dealing with divine justice and mercy, God's care for His people, punishment for wickedness and reward for righteousness in a manner that surpasses human wisdom. When we study all the books carefully we find that no book which ought to be there is missing and none which ought not to be there is found there. When viewed as a whole they are like the petals of a large and beautiful flower—all closely connected with one another and each occupying its proper place. This sort of organic unity cannot be expected of a book written by different authors who lived in different countries and in different periods of time and who knew little about one another. The fact that the Bible has this wonderful peculiarity is an important proof of its divine inspiration.

Chapter 2

DIVINE INSPIRATION OF THE BIBLE

Claim to Divine Inspiration

There are several verses in the Bible which claim that everything recorded in it was written in obedience to the will of God. Therefore the ideas and the words expressing them, according to this claim, are divinely inspired. This means, though the work of writing was done by human authors the real Author who made them write was God. That is why we read in II Timothy 3:16, “All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness” and in II Peter 1:20-21, “no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God”. A unique characteristic of the Bible is that most of the commandments we are expected to obey are introduced in it as the very words of the Lord. There occurs more than 2000 times, the expression “says the Lord” in the context of these commandments or exhortations. As the Book warns us about the eternal punishment that will be given to all liars who love falsehood (Revelation 21:8) it is not reasonable to think that its writers were liars who falsely made this claim. We have to think that they were truthful and honest and they made this claim sincerely. That their claim is not an erroneous one is proved by the accurate fulfillment of the numerous prophecies they recorded.

Fulfillment of Prophecies

A study of the various prophecies in the Bible makes it clear that no man dependent only on his own wisdom would utter them. For example we find the first prophetic description of Christ as the 'seed of woman' (Gen. 3:15); in the case of no other person do we come across this sort of description. In Genesis, the births of a large number of people are recorded; they all are described as the seeds of men born of, not the mother, but the father; none is described as the 'seed of woman'. This prophecy about Christ made by God in about 4000 B.C. was recorded by Moses in 1500 B.C. About 750 years later, Isaiah was inspired to write, "Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14. Immanuel = God is with us). These prophecies were accurately fulfilled when virgin Mary, by the Holy Spirit miraculously conceived Jesus Christ and gave birth to Him in Bethlehem (Lk. 1:26 – 2:14). If Moses and Isaiah had written in the light of the wisdom they had learnt, they would not have described a man (Christ, the Messiah) as the seed of a woman or as one born of a virgin. That they dared to prophesy so and it was miraculously fulfilled later on, is proof of the divine inspiration of their writings. There are many prophecies of this sort in the Old Testament. A good number of them have already been fulfilled; some are being fulfilled and the rest are going to be fulfilled. The prophecies concerning Israel are examples of those which are being fulfilled now.

Israel in the light of prophecy

The dispersion of Israel from Palestine in the first century A.D and their regathering in their homeland in the 20th century constitute an incredible episode in the political history of the world and an undeniable evidence of the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures. Nowhere else in the world and never before in the history of nations have we come across the phenomenon of a nation being destroyed completely, its people scattered all over the world and after 1900 years that nation reestablished and its people brought back and resettled. That exactly is what has happened in the case of Israel. It is when we examine the relevant prophecies in the Bible that we understand the secret behind this strange phenomenon. In the book of Leviticus, written in about 1500 B.C. it was recorded, “Yet in spite of this, you do not obey me, but act with hostility against me, then I will act with wrathful hostility against you, you, however, I will scatter among the nations and will draw out a sword after you, as your land becomes desolate and your cities become waste” (Lev. 26:27-33). In the book of Ezekiel, written in the 6th century B.C. we read, “And I shall scatter you among the nations, and I shall disperse you through the lands, and I shall consume your uncleanness from you” (Ezek. 22:15). It was in accordance with these prophecies and the words of Christ about the great Temple of Jerusalem², that the Roman army under the command of Titus destroyed Jerusalem in A.D.

2. “Truly I say to you not one stone here shall be left upon another, which will not be torn down” Mathew: 24:2.

70, killed thousands of Jews and made the survivors leave their land and go to the various parts of the world. As a result they wandered all over the world and suffered persecutions in almost all countries for 1900 years. However, in the 20th century efforts were made to reestablish their nation and in 1948 the State of Israel came into existence. This was followed by a great influx of Jews from the four corners of the world into their ancient, but new homeland. It has continued ever since and today we find Jews everywhere in the world consider it their sacred duty to go back to the land of their forefathers as early as possible.

The story of the Jewish nation is really wonderful; its re-establishment after nineteen centuries and its people returning to that land from the different parts of the world is a unique phenomenon in the political and cultural history of the world. What is most interesting in this connection is the fact that all this was prophesied in the Bible several centuries ago. Isaiah wrote in the 8th century B.C., “And He will lift up a standard for the nations, And will assemble the banished ones of Israel, and will gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth” (Is. 11:12). The prophet Jeremiah wrote a century later, “Then I myself shall gather the remnant of My flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and shall bring them back to their pasture; and they will be fruitful and multiply” (Jere. 23:3). Thus we find that the dispersion and the regathering of the Jews are not mere accidents of history, but are events that prove the truth of Biblical prophecies and testify to the divine inspiration of the Holy scrip-

tures. However, the fact that the books of the Bible were written by men inspired by the Holy Spirit does not mean they wrote mechanically and their brains had no role in the work they did. What this means is that God chose suitable men to write each book in the style suited to its theme and He made them express the ideas He wanted them to, approving of their linguistic style and guiding them to use their scholarly and literary abilities according to His Will. Thus the Bible, though written by human authors is rightly described as the Word of God.

Chapter 3

INERRANCY OF THE BIBLE

Scientific Truths in the Bible

Though the Bible is not a book of history or science there are many references in it to historical or scientific facts. They have been made because of contextual needs and not with a view to describing history or teaching science. What is noteworthy about these references is that they are accurate and free from errors. Thus in the book of Job written probably even before Moses wrote his books, we read, “He stretches out the north over empty space, And hangs the earth on nothing” (Job 26:7). These words were written in an age when nobody would think of an object hanging in empty space unsupported by anything. According to the Ptolemaic theory of the universe, the stars of heaven are studded on the sky which is a sort of shell surrounding the earth. The Greek mythology described the earth as an object supported by pillars held in position by the Titan Atlas. Indian mythology described the earth as being supported by the thousand headed serpent Ananthan. The concept of heavenly bodies hanging in empty space unsupported by anything was unknown to the ancient world. But in the oldest book of the Bible, when a casual reference was made to the position of the earth, it was described as an object hanging in empty space. This is an important proof of the inerrancy of the Holy Scriptures. Another fact of science referred to in the Bible is that the interior of the earth is like a fiery

furnace. We read, “The earth, from it comes food, and underneath it is turned up as fire” (Job. 28:5). It is known to the students of modern science that the core of the earth is a molten mass of great density and temperature. But there was no means for the ancients to know this. Yet the observation of the author of the book of Job about the interior of the earth, made long before the dawn of modern scientific age is accurate. Another proof of the inerrancy of the Bible is the statement in it about blood. Today we know that blood is the source of life and that loss of blood results in loss of life. But until the end of the nineteenth century medical practitioners were not properly aware of this fact and they used blood-letting as a means of curing many illnesses. Nobody knows how many thousands have died rather of this ‘cure’ than of their illnesses. But in the Bible it was recorded 3500 years ago that blood is the source of life. Leviticus 17:11 reads, “For the life of the flesh is in the blood”. The implied scientific fact was accepted by our medical world only after the end of the 18th century. We have to admit that the description of blood as the source of life by the author of Leviticus is an undeniable proof of the scientific accuracy of the Bible.

Historical Truths in the Bible

All the references in the Bible to the Egyptian and Mesopotamian civilizations and the reigns of great kings like Nebuchadnezzar, Darius, Artaxerxes, Ahasuerus, Augustus, Herod and Agrippa are historically accurate and free from any error.

There is perfect harmony between the historical references in the Bible and the facts of history discovered by our secular historians. So in the area of historical references too, the Bible is free from errors.

Thus we see that this most ancient book written by human authors under the guidance of the Holy Spirit is divinely inspired, and is free from errors of any kind. A careful study of its contents reveals that it is not like any other book in the world; it is in fact the message from God, our Creator, to every one of us - mankind.

Chapter 4

GREATNESS OF THE BIBLE

Invention of the Modern Printing Press

The Bible has a unique place in the history of human progress and civilization. It was the first book that Johannes Gutenberg (the inventor of the modern printing press) showed to the world as proof of the usefulness of his invention in 1455. Ever since it was the printing of this very same book that inaugurated the work of the printing press in most countries. The history of the development of languages testifies to the fact that it was the efforts of the Christian Missionaries to help people read and understand the Bible that necessitated the spread of printing, development of languages and dissemination of knowledge.

Awareness of Human Rights

The efforts of Missionaries to help people get a clear understanding of the Bible led them to establish schools wherever they went; eventually this resulted in great progress in education and science in several countries. An examination of the cultural history of the world shows that the reading of this book spread awareness of human rights and gradually led to the abolition of slavery in many countries. The history of Afro-Asian countries reveals the fact that it was the influence of this book that resulted in several social reforms; cannibalism (cooking and eating hu-

man flesh) was prevalent in many parts of the world until the end of the 19th century; the Fiji islands were previously known as Cannibal Isles; it was as result of the Christian Missionaries' teaching of the Bible (since the 1830s) that the people of these islands gave up their barbarian habit. It was after the Christian Missionaries started printing and distributing the Bible in regional languages that Lord William Bentinck, the Governor General of India came out boldly and issued on 4th December 1829 the Proclamation putting an end to 'Sati' (the North Indian practice of burning widows along with the dead bodies of their husbands in the funeral pyre). The spread of the ideas of the Bible is closely related to social reformers striving for the abolition of evils such as 'untouchability' in India (not permitting people of low castes to walk along public roads or draw water from wells used by people of high castes).

Spread of Education and Modern Legal system

The cultural history of the world shows that the universal spread of education was a direct result of the efforts of Christian Missionaries to enable people in all parts of the world to read the Bible in their own languages. This indirectly contributed to the advancement of knowledge in all fields, increased the awareness of human rights and promoted social reforms. It is beyond doubt that the ideas of this book have served as a great motive force for social and political reforms in all parts of the world.

It is noteworthy that the legal system of the modern world

owes much to this great book. The laws according to which the courts of the modern world function and carry on the administration of justice are based on the Roman Law codified by Emperor Justinian in the sixth century. The main principles that formed the basis of this Law were those borrowed from the Mosaic Law recorded in the Old Testament of the Bible.

All these facts show that the Bible, no doubt, is the Book of books that has enlightened the world, transformed it, inspired men to achieve great things, strengthened the weak and ennobled our lives in many a way. Inability or refusal, to read and understand this book is a misfortune much greater than the inability or refusal to see the sun that gives us the warmth and light necessary for our physical life.

Introduction to the Bible. CHRISTINE HAYES. Copyright Date: 2012.Â Biblical authors wrote in many contexts and responded to a sweeping range of crises and questions concerning issues that were political, economic, historical, cultural, philosophical, religious, and moral. In probing chapters devoted to each of the 24 books of the Hebrew Bible, or Old Testament, Hayes reconstructs the meanings and messages of each book and encourages a deeper appreciation of the historical and cultural settings of ancient biblical literature. eISBN: 978-0-300-18827-1. Subjects: Religion, History, Language & Literature.