

The Harvester



Preparing Souls

To Serve The Lord



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The Bible

Divine Testimony and Divine Interpretation

By Brian R. Kenyon

The Bible is the only written revelation from the mind of God! For this reason, the Bible is its own best interpreter. The apostle Peter declared that the Scriptures themselves are both Divine testimony and Divine interpretation, when he wrote,

Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. ²¹For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. (2 Pet. 1:20-21, KJV)

To appreciate the meaning of these two verses, an examination of the context is necessary.

Apostolic Knowledge

Peter wrote against the background of false teachers who were trying to lead the church into error, particularly by questioning the accuracy of the Old Testament prophets as well as the New Testament writers (2 Pet. 2:1-2, 10, 13-14, 19; 3:4, 5-7, 16). In meeting their attack, the apostle made clear that Christianity was based on reliable, irrefutable sources. Peter initially declared that Christianity was based upon the knowledge of the apostles.

For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. ¹⁷For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. ¹⁸And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount. (2 Pet. 1:16-18)

These verses give three reasons why the apostles' knowledge was (and is) irrefutable. First, the apostles' knowledge did not come from religious fiction. The word translated "fables" refers to stories, legends, or myths. These "fables" were said to be "cunningly devised," which means that they were invented or devised artificially. In other words, the apostles did not receive their information from cleverly invented stories. Elsewhere, Paul warned the young evangelists against becoming entrapped in these "fables" (1 Tim. 4:7; Tit. 1:14). Peter's declaration that the apostles' teaching did not come from fictional stories is in stark contrast to any other religion, including so called "Christian" denominations. The founders and so-called "prophets" and/or "apostles" of these religions were not inspired by the only true God, but were the products and promoters of "cunningly devised fables"!

Second, the apostles' knowledge was gained from being eyewitnesses. An "eyewitness" is one who sees with his own eyes. The Greek word was used in non-biblical literature to refer to those "who, after their initiation, were permitted to look into the mysteries of a cult" (Kistemaker 265). This passage, of course, does not depend on this meaning because the apostles were actual observers of Christ's majesty. Second Peter 1:16 contains the only occurrence of this Greek noun, but the verb is found twice, where it is translated "shall behold [observe, NKJ]" (1 Pet. 2:12; 3:2). The apostles not only saw, but they also were permitted to behold and look into the glory of Christ (cf. 1 Jn. 1:1-3). The eyewitness testimony of the apostles is also

in stark contrast to any other religion, so called “Christian” denominations included. The founders and leaders of those religions were never eyewitnesses of any divine being! They may have had dreams and “revelations,” but rest assured, those activities did not originate with God (cf. Deut. 13:1-3; Jer. 23:26-32)!

Third, the apostles’ knowledge involved the witness by some of them of the Son of God receiving “honor and glory” at the Transfiguration (2 Pet. 1:17-18 cf. Mt. 17:1-8). Peter, James, and John witnessed the sights of the transfiguration and the sound of the Father’s voice from heaven saying, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (2 Pet. 1:17). Regardless of the claims of the false teachers against whom Peter wrote, people today can trust the eyewitness testimony of the apostles. In the Old Testament, two or three witnesses were all that was needed to confirm something (Deut. 17:6). The eyewitnesses of Jesus were numerous (cf. 1 Cor. 15:5-8). Even those who were against Him acknowledged His deity (Mt. 27:54)!

Prophecy

Not only were the apostles themselves an irrefutable source of Christianity, Peter pointed out another irrefutable source that is extremely applicable to this article; namely, prophecy. He declared,

We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts. (2 Pet. 1:19)

The expression “more sure word of prophecy,” translated by the NKJ as “the prophetic word confirmed,” in

the immediate context of Second Peter 1, refers to the Old Testament prophecies of Christ confirmed by the Transfiguration witnessed by Peter, James, and John. As the next verses will indicate, the confirmed “word of prophecy” extends to all the writings of inspired men in both the Old and New Testaments. From Moses to Malachi to John, writing from the isle of Patmos, all the prophets spoke with one voice (cf. 1 Pet. 1:10-11). One of the most powerful evidences for the truth of New Testament Christianity is the fulfilled prophecies of the Bible (cf. Acts 3:24; Rom. 15:12). No other religious document—not even the Koran nor the Book of Mormon—contain truly fulfilled prophecies, except those prophecies they copied from the Bible!

People today can know assuredly that all the prophecies recorded in Scripture are true because they did not originate with men. Peter wrote, “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation” (2 Pet. 1:20). The term “private interpretation” has been misunderstood by many. Some falsely conclude that it means no one is capable of interpreting the Scriptures; thus, Holy Spirit illumination or *ex cathedra* or something else is needed to understand the Scriptures. Others falsely surmise that it condemns the individual from reaching his or her own conclusions about Scripture; thus, the Roman Catholic Church (or some other group of men) is the only entity that can rightly interpret the Scriptures (see Woods 161-162). However, a closer examination of the text indicates that “private interpretation” is not referring to the *readers* of prophecy but to the *writers* of prophecy. The prophetic writings were not the result of the prophets’ own interpretation, but were the result of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit!

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Florida School of Preaching
1807 South Florida Avenue
Lakeland, Florida 33803
(863) 683-4043

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The word “is” (2 Pet. 1:20) is translated from a Greek word (*ginomai*) that means to become, to come into being. The word in this context has to do with origin. The word translated “private” (from *idios*) literally means “one’s own.” The question is whether it refers to the “prophet’s own interpretation” or to “the reader’s own interpretation.” With the use of “is” (*ginomai*), Peter points to the meaning of the “prophet’s own interpretation.” Thus, “no prophecy of the scripture” originated from the prophet’s own “private interpretation.” In fact, there were times when the prophets themselves did not even know the meaning of what they prophesied (cf. 1 Pet. 1:10-12).

The word translated “interpretation” (from *epilusis*) means “releasing, solving, explaining, interpreting” (Rogers and Rogers 584). The Greek word occurs only here in the New Testament, but is used in the Septuagint (the Koine Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament) to refer to Joseph’s interpreting of dreams (Gen. 40:8; 41:8, 12). These incidents in Joseph’s life give insight to the Biblical meaning of this word translated “interpretation.” Did Joseph interpret the dreams of the chief butler and chief baker, and later the dream of Pharaoh, by his own wisdom and insight? Or did Joseph’s interpretation come from God? Obviously, God was the source of his interpretations. When Pharaoh confronted Joseph about his reputed ability to interpret dreams, Joseph declared, “It is not in me: God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace” (Gen. 41:16).

Thus, Peter was saying that no prophecy of the Scripture came into existence as a result of the prophet’s own explanation. Scriptural prophecy never had its origin with the will of men. Only false prophets are said to have originated their own message (Jer. 23:16; Ezk. 13:3).

Originated with Deity

True prophecy originated with Deity. “For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men

of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Pet. 1:20-21). There is a strong contrast between the two parts of this verse to emphasize the point. The English conjunction “but” is translated from a strong adversative (*alla*) in the original language. In strong contrast to “the will of men,” prophecy came about “by the Holy Ghost”! The word “moved” was a “maritime metaphor” used of a ship carried along by the wind (Green 102). The same Greek word was also used in Acts 27:15, 17, in reference to a ship’s relationship to the wind in Paul’s travels. The prophets, as it were, “raised their sails” in obedience and receptivity, allowing the Holy Spirit to fill them and carry them along in the direction He wanted (Green 102).

Conclusion

In these few verses, Peter showed that all Scripture is from the mind God, not the fallible minds of humanity (2 Pet. 1:20-21 cf. 2 Tim. 3:16-17). As such, all Scripture is both Divine testimony from “holy men of God” and Divine interpretation from “the Holy Ghost.” The responsibility of Christians today, therefore, is to ascertain the meaning of Scripture and its application for those living in this world. Furthermore, salvation is absolutely dependant upon properly understanding the Bible, and the only way to assure that is to allow the Bible to interpret the Bible!

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What Is Meant By “Plenary Verbal Inspiration”?

By Brian R. Kenyon

The view of inspiration represented by the term in the title above says that through the superintending influence of the Holy Spirit on the writers of Scripture, the account and interpretation of God’s revelation have been recorded exactly as God intended so that the Bible is actually the word of God. “Plenary” is from a Latin word that means full or complete. “Verbal” means to the very words. Inspiration did not merely involve the thoughts of the writers, but extended even to the place of each word. Inspiration means “God-breathed” (2 Tim. 3:16, *theopneustos*, θεόπνευστος)!

Inspiration recorded what God revealed so that the resulting document carries the same authority as if God himself were speaking directly. This accounts for the difference in style between writers. God Inspired to the very “plane” of each word. Though we may not understand the exact process, we can know that the product is the very word of God!

Several lines of evidence can be used to prove the Bible is the inspired word of God. It must first be noted that the Bible is not inspired merely because it claims to be. Other religious documents claim to be God-inspired (i.e., the

Florida School of Preaching

1807 South Florida Avenue

Lakeland, FL 33803

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Koran, the Book of Mormon, Science and Health with Keys to Scripture, etc.). The Bible, however, is the only document that is truly “God-breathed”!

A sufficient line of evidence that the Bible is God-inspired is predictive prophecy. An argument may be set forth as follows: If the Bible contains predictive prophecy whose origin can only be explained by supernatural influence, then the Bible’s authorship involves supernatural influence. The Bible does contain predictive prophecy whose origin can only be explained by supernatural influence (cf. Gen. 3:15; Deut. 28:1-68; Isa. 7:14; 9:6; 53:1-12, etc.). Therefore, the Bible’s authorship involves supernatural influence.

There are many claims of prophecy in the world, past and present, but each prophecy must be evaluated according to three criteria (adapted from Jackie Stearsman’s Christian evidences notes): (1) it must be remote enough in time so as to eliminate mere guess work—Old Testament prophecies were given hundreds of years before their fulfillment; (2) it must be specific enough to avoid vague generalizations (which could apply to many situations)—Old Testament prophecies were minutely detailed (cf. Isa. 44:28-45:1); and (3) it must have a clear and 100% accurate fulfillment. Biblical prophecies are the only ones that meet all of these criteria! 

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