

GOD HATH SPOKEN

A sermon delivered by Batsell Barrett Baxter on March 28, 1965 at the Hillsboro Church of Christ, Nashville, Tennessee, and heard over radio station WLAC at 8:05 P.M.

Let us imagine that you have never seen or heard of the Bible. It is a concept entirely foreign to your past experience. Then, suddenly, someone hands you a copy. You examine it carefully, thumbing through its pages, feeling its leather binding, noticing its careful printing, and pondering its great size. At this point the one who handed you the Bible points out that it is a book which contains 66 divisions or separate books. Each of these is divided into chapters, of which there are more than 3,000. When it comes to words, there are more than three quarters of a million. As you are beginning to be overwhelmed by its sheer magnitude, he adds the challenging fact that it can be read from Genesis through Revelation, aloud, the slow way, in only eighty-nine and one-half hours. Its size and its makeup mark the Bible as a most unusual book, though these are the least significant of its characteristics.

As your examination of this remarkable book continues, you soon desire to ask, "Who wrote it?" Your friend answers that approximately forty different men, stretching over a period of some 1600 years, wrote the various segments that make up the Bible. The writers were often "unlearned and ignorant men," as some of the New Testament religious leaders called the apostles. (Acts 4:13) They were fishermen, farmers, tax-collectors, shepherds, and the like. As you begin to read the pages of the scriptures, you are amazed at both the remarkable message that is presented and the remarkable manner in which this message is delivered. You wonder, "How could virtually uneducated, untrained men of the ancient past write so remarkably?" You are utterly unprepared for a book like Amos, coming from the pen of an unlettered dresser of sycamore trees. You find it difficult to believe that an unschooled shepherd boy like David could write poems like the 19th, the 23rd, and the 51st Psalms.

You turn to your friend and ask, "How could these men have written as they did?" He responds, "These men claimed to be the spokesmen of God. They disclaimed any personal credit for their writings, indicating rather, that God was speaking through them." For example Peter wrote, "For no prophecy ever came by the will of men: but men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit." (II Peter 1:21). The apostle Paul said, "But we received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is from God; that we might know the things that were freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Spirit teacheth; combining spiritual things with spiritual words." (I Cor. 2:12-13).

Can It Be Proved?

At this point you inquire, "Can it be proved that these men really did speak from God?" Your friend replies, "That largely depends upon you, for proof is something that is achieved in man's mind. A significant, impressive amount of evidence can be supplied to indicate that these men were inspired by the Holy Spirit of God, but whether this constitutes proof will depend upon the openness of your mind." Then he begins to suggest some of the evidence.

He submits as evidence the exalted quality of the message, which has not been surpassed in its basic principles of living in all of the centuries since the Bible was completed. The remarkable manner in which the men wrote, also not surpassed by all of the writers of more recent centuries, is further evidence. The easy, natural, unselfconscious "air of infallibility" about these ancient writers is also impressive. They felt no need to prove that their message was from above.

Your friend asks, "How could such untrained minds have come to know such great truths, and how could such inexperienced hands have come to write such great master pieces, if God had not truly told them what to write?" He then quotes Henry Theissen, in his *Introduction to the New Testament*, p. 85, "How could uninspired men write a book that commands all duty, forbids all sin, including the sin of hypocrisy and lying, denounce all human merit as insufficient for salvation ... and condemns to hell for all eternity all who reject this one way of salvation, and persist in sin?"

Unity

Your friend also points out the fact that the unity of the scriptures is convincing. The sixty-six books of the Bible were written by approximately forty different men, over a period of nearly 1600 years. They used different languages and lived in different countries, yet they presented one central theme, without variation and contradiction. This unity could not have been achieved except that God guided the various writers. John W. Haley in his book, *Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible*, deals with 975 so-called discrepancies in a very convincing way. Many of these are very ancient and some are more modern, but they cover the field of alleged discrepancies.

James Orr, speaking of the Mohammedan, Zoroastrian, and Buddhist scriptures, says, "They are destitute of beginning, middle or end. They are, for the most part, collections of heterogeneous material, loosely placed together. How different every one must acknowledge it to be with the Bible! From Genesis to Revelation we feel that this book is in a real sense a unity. It is not a collection of fragments, but has as we say, an organic character ... There is nothing exactly resembling it, or even approaching it, in all literature." Since the men who wrote the Bible did it in different languages, in different centuries, in different countries, and generally had no access to the

other writings at the time of their own writing, the unity that one finds in these sixty-six books is another evidence that the writers must have been guided by some divine mind.

Prophecies

There are other qualities that make this book unusual. In the Old Testament there are passages which speak of events that were yet to come, which we call prophecies. Some of them tell about events that were to happen a thousand years in the future, and many of them were written 750 years before the events. The amazing thing is that in the course of time the prophecies came true.

For example, there are scores and scores of passages foretelling the coming of a Messiah. They describe the town in which he would be born, the tribe from which he would come, the kind of life he would live, the kind of death he would die, and even minute details of what would happen in his death and in his burial. Amazingly, 750 years after a number of these prophecies were written, they were fulfilled not by Jesus alone nor by his friends, but even as in his death, by the Roman soldiers who crucified him. Is it not strange that men in the ancient past could have been able to predict with such absolute accuracy the events that were yet to unfold? Impressive and unique are the prophecies of the Bible.

Scientific Foreknowledge

We are also impressed by the scientific foreknowledge that one finds in the Bible. Remember that these men wrote when the most advanced scientists of the ancient world, in Greece and in Egypt, believed that the world was flat and that it was resting on the back of a giant turtle or elephant. Is it not strange that the writers of the Bible should have been guarded from making the blunders that would have made their book a laughingstock in the twentieth century?

On the other hand we do find in this book some rather impressive scientific suggestions. For example, many centuries before men ordinarily knew that the world was round, we read in the Bible of the "circle of the earth." (Isa. 40:22). We even find the expression, "He hangeth the earth upon nothing" (Job 26:71, which was not known by most people as late as the time when Columbus sailed for America. They still thought the earth was flat. In the book of Genesis, written at least 3500 years ago, there is a mention of the numberlessness of the stars (Gen. 15:5), which you and I take for granted. It is interesting to know that the leading scientists of Egypt in the second century B.C. spoke through Hiparchus, one of their leaders, to say that they had counted the stars and found 1,022. Then early in the second century A.D. one of the Ptolemys wrote to say that Hiparchus was wrong. He had counted and found 1,026. Is it not strange that at least 1500 years before either of these men someone wrote of the numberlessness of the stars?

Beyond these there is the fact that the Law of Moses held pre-suppositions concerning the transmission of diseases which were not known generally until the time of Louis Pasteur. When a person was suspected of having leprosy he was required by Moses' law to go outside the camp and to remain there until declared well by a priest. We call this quarantine. In that same connection there is the command that a man should cover his lips and cry "Unclean, unclean," when anyone came near him, if he possessed certain diseases. There is also the command that the Israelites should wash their hands in running water. Remember that they lived in an arid world. Water was precious, but someone must have known that a common basin or a common bowl, would mean the spreading of disease, so running water was required. Louis Pasteur and others of his time gave us the reason behind these laws, hundreds and hundreds of years later.

Style

We are also deeply impressed by the unusual style in which the scriptures are written. One characteristic of the style of the writers is the unbiased manner in which they told the stories of various people. The writers set forth the virtues and follies of friends and foes alike. They were objective reporters. While Abraham was the father of the Hebrew race, we also find in his story the account of his deception (Gen. 12:10-13; 20:12). While David was Israel's greatest king, we find in his great biography also the black chapter of his sin with Bathsheba (II Sam. 11:1-21). We read of the anger of James and John (Luke 9:51-,55), and we also read of their ambition (Matt. 20:20-28), even though they were two of the foremost apostles. In the story of Peter, there is no minimization of his denial of Christ (Matt. 26:69-75), even though it would be an embarrassing memory throughout the early decades of the church. The impartiality of the Holy Spirit is obvious. There are no apologies for Peter, no reproaches for Judas, just the facts.

We are also impressed with the calmness of the scriptures. The wonderful and the commonplace are described alike. The emotions of the writers are not apparent. We do not find the human adjectives--amazing, unbelievable, unprecedented, stupendous, colossal, unrivaled--even though the writers were dealing with some of the most momentous events in all history. Imagine writing of the transfiguration (Matt. 17:1-5), Christ's miracles, like the feeding of the five thousand, his walking on the water, and his raising of Lazarus from the dead, without injecting adjectives such as we have just mentioned. Yet the accounts of these events, along with the description of Gethsemane, the crucifixion, the resurrection, and the great ingathering of three thousand souls of Pentecost, are described in very ordinary, unemotional, commonplace language.

We are also greatly impressed by the brevity of the scriptures. Genesis uses only thirty-four verses to tell of the creation of the material universe, the vegetable world, the animal world and man. Only fifty chapters are used to tell of the origin of the world and its

history for the first 2500 years. This contrasts sharply with the volubility of the newspapers and magazines of our own day. The average sports reporter takes more space to tell about a high school basketball game than Moses was guided to take in telling about the creation of the universe. *Readers' Digest* each month uses more words than God's book uses to tell about the first 2500 years of man's history on earth.

In telling the story of Christ, Matthew uses only twenty-eight chapters, Mark only sixteen, Luke only twenty-four, and John only twenty-one. Only five verses are used to tell of Jesus' baptism. (Matt. 3:13-17). Only eight verses are used to tell of the transfiguration (Matt. 17:1-8). The death of the first apostle martyr, James, is described in only eleven words in Acts 12:2. We wonder how he faced death? What was the reaction of the disciples? Yet, the story is told in only eleven words, "And he killed James the brother of John with the sword."

The omissions of the scriptures are also impressive. John's gospel omits the account of the birth of John the Baptist. It also omits the account of Jesus' birth, genealogy, youth, baptism, temptation, transfiguration and ascension. Neither Mark nor John mentions anything in the first thirteen years of Christ's life. There is no virgin birth, no genealogy, and no childhood mentioned. In contrast to this an ancient work called the *Protoevangelium*, which was written in the second century, devoted twenty-five chapters to the supposed events between the annunciation to Mary and Herod's slaughter of the innocents. Another ancient work, *The Gospel of the Infancy*, devoted fifty chapters to the first twelve years of Christ's life. Perhaps we should add that both of these books are uninspired and are considered to be pure fiction, but they do show man's natural tend to volubility.

The apostle John tells of only approximately twenty different days of our Lord's life and ministry, This is remarkable in view of the fact that the total life of Christ covers more than 12,000 days, and his active ministry more than 1,270 days. In spite of this all four of the gospel narratives, taken together, tell of events which happened on only thirty-four different days in the life of Christ. Out of the 879 verses in the gospel of John, 237 pertain to one day of Jesus' life. No wonder, with this restriction upon him, John said, "Many other signs therefore did Jesus in the presence of the disciples which are not written in this book; but these are written, that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in his name." (John 20:30-31). The final sentence in his gospel reads, "And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which if they should be written everyone, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that should be written." (John 21:25).

The significance of all these facts is apparent. Men do not write like this. The only possible explanation for the brevity, the omissions, the calmness, and the unbiased nature of the scripture narratives is that God guided and limited the writers. Remember, too, that many of these men were unlearned and ignorant men--fishermen, tax-collectors, and such like. Truly the Bible is God's book. We must study it to learn God's will for us. We must obey its commands in order to please God and be saved.

Influence

Finally, we would point out the tremendous influence that the Bible has had upon mankind wherever it has been read, as an evidence that it must be from God. Wherever the Bible has gone civilization has been lifted to a higher plain. It has made better husbands and wives, better fathers and mothers, better sons and daughters, and better employers and employees. It has been the strongest influence for good in the history of the world. Many of the major institutions of our modern world were created by the teaching and influence of the scriptures. Many of the laws that make our land a pleasant place in which to live also came from the teaching of the Bible.

We have generally found it to be a just rule to judge something by the fruit which it bears. The Bible has borne good fruit. Would this not be unusually strange if the men who claim to be speaking for God were at that very moment hypocrites and imposters? Would their message of high morality, honesty, integrity, truthfulness, and the like not have lost its power had these men not been consistent in their own lives with their message? If we are to judge the scriptures by the influence that they have had, we can only say that it must have been from God.

Let us also bear in mind that it is much easier to voice objectives, raise doubts, and ask questions than it is to demonstrate the truthfulness of a proposition. Let those who doubt that the Bible is a book from God give us a reasonable explanation of how it came to be. Let them explain its remarkable style, its fulfilled prophecies, its impressive unity, and its magnificent influence.

In the Library of Congress in Washington, D. C. there are more than nine million different books, more than forty-five million different items. Of all of these works, of all of the books that have ever been written, the most remarkable is the Holy Bible. It is unique and impressive, but it is more. It is the inspired, authoritative word of God. Our responsibility is to read and study its contents until we know God's will for man. Then it is our obligation to confirm our lives to the pattern that our Lord suggests. When obedient to his teachings, we find that we have brought untold blessings into our own lives. Life on earth becomes beautiful, and the anticipation of an eternity in heaven with God becomes real. Let us be thankful that "God hath spoken."