

Planet in Rebellion

the streaming constellations of the skies, to establish His kingdom. He saw not a martyr, but a sacrifice. And he said, "Save me!" That is the point. Was this a man-just a good man-the best man, it may be-dying as a passive victim in the hands of wicked men? Or was it incarnate God paying the price for a lost race?

Never forget it! If He was a mere man, we are describing only murder. If He was God, we are describing an offering. If He was only a man, we are witnessing a martyr. If He was God, we are witnessing a sacrifice! Sin with its deadly fallout spells death. Death is in it. Death is written on every nerve, tissue, and cell of our bodies. The whole human race is affected. And there is nothing any mortal can do about it. A sacrifice is needed. A martyr could not touch it. But "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son." That is the solution! Sin had built up in intensity until it became a critical mass at Calvary. But the Son of God threw His own body across the fury of its chain reaction and broke its destructive power -to save you, and me! Thank God! And when I see it-see it as it is, a gift of God for one so unworthy as I-it breaks my proud, hard heart. It softens and subdues my restless nature. And when I hear Him say, "Father, forgive them," I know He means me! I know He means you!

6. Treasures in Clay

PARCHED, desolate hills! Distant, inaccessible caves! Forgotten retreats silently keeping their treasures in clay! And then-a Bedouin boy looking for a lost goat. A stone tossed idly through a hole in a cliff. The sound of cracking pottery. Tightly rolled scrolls, and fragments-fragments that, painstakingly put together, would shatter the doubts of a surprised world. Bedouin boys looking for goats! Little did these lads dream that they held in their hands actual copies of the Sacred Scriptures-copies a thousand years older than any Hebrew manuscripts yet found. Looking for goats. Yet in their hands they held one of the most sensational discoveries of the twentieth century-the Dead Sea Scrolls.

A surprised and grateful Christendom watched as overnight these earliest known manuscripts thrust themselves squarely into the spotlight of the world's rapt attention. Men must now stand by while God Himself, using a Bedouin boy and a divinely guided stone, vindicated His Word. In this age of modern scientific discovery the claims of the Book we call the Bible demand that every man find a solid, satisfying answer to these vital questions: Where did the Bible come from? Has it been preserved from error through the centuries? Can we count on it-this Book that to many has been the puzzle of the ages?

All this we hope to learn from the fascinating story of how we got our Bible. Did you know that the Bible is actually a library of sixty-six books? And did you know that it took about fifteen hundred years to write it? That its sixty-six books were composed by nearly forty writers, the first of whom, of course, never lived to see the last? What a jumble of confused and conflicting ideas the Bible would be if forty impostors had taken it upon themselves to write it! Yet these forty men, without the opportunity to counsel together, have written in intricate harmony.

Suppose that a man from South America should send me a peculiarly shaped piece of white marble, and that different men, unacquainted with each other, from several widely separated countries should do likewise. And then suppose I should find that these strangely carved pieces of marble fit together into the perfect whole of a lovely statue. How would you explain it? "Oh," you say, "that is easy. One man planned the whole design and gave blueprints or patterns to sculptors in various lands."

And you would be exactly right. So it was with the Bible. Businessmen, kings, preachers, fishermen, soldiers, and statesmen were chosen by God, each to bring parts of a complete message to His people. All these parts are in flawless harmony-evidence of their divine origin. Written by forty men, did I say? Or shall we discover that the Bible has but one Author? Listen to 2 Peter 1:21: "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."

There you have it! The Holy Spirit of God, the Third Person of the Godhead, was the Voice that spoke. And these holy men, these prophets, became the channels for that Voice. "Yes," someone is saying, "that is what the Book claims. But how can I know that those words within the Book, the claims it makes for itself, are true?" May I answer your question by using a simple illustration? A teen-age boy is sent to the drugstore for some sulfur. In a little while he returns holding a package in his hand. Is this the sulfur we desired?

We immediately open the package and see that it is labeled "sulfur." It looks like sulfur. It smells like sulfur. It claims to be sulfur. This is the internal evidence that we have sulfur. But is it really sulfur?

Planet in Rebellion

We turn to the boy who brought it. He reports that upon arrival at the drugstore he asked for sulfur. The pharmacist went to the shelves, took something out of a bottle, prepared a package, and the boy came straight home. This is the historical evidence that the little package contains sulfur. In other words, the story of how it came into our hands indicates that it must be sulfur. But is it really?

We now apply the final test. We ignite it, and immediately know that it is sulfur by its characteristic blue flame and suffocating odor. This is the experimental evidence. It proves to be genuine sulfur. Now as we face our task of identifying the Word of God, I think you will agree that the safest procedure-and a most rewarding one would be to follow these same three steps. In so doing, we shall find from the internal evidence-from what it says about itself-that it claims to be the Word of God. From the historical evidence-from the intriguing details of how our Bible has come down to us-we shall discover that it must be the Word of God. And finally, from the experimental evidence-what it actually does for men-we shall see that it proves to be the Word of God.

Do you see how logical our task becomes? Naturally we would begin with the claims from within the Book itself-the internal evidence. We have already read that "holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy" Spirit. And 2 Timothy 3:16 claims that "all scripture is given by inspiration of God." There is no question about what its claims are. It claims, without qualification, to be the authoritative Word of the living God. And never forget it, that claim is either true or not true. It cannot be both.

Think it through. The Bible claims to be written by men inspired by the Holy Spirit. Either its writers were inspired, or they were the most consistent liars the world has ever produced. You see, it is impossible for the Bible to be merely a good book. If its claims are not true, they are lies. And a book of lies cannot be a good book. But now, if God did speak through "holy men" of old, how have these writings come down to us? How can we know that their accuracy has been preserved through the centuries? How can we know that the printed Bibles in our homes today contain the identical message that God spoke through the inspired prophets?

Quickly scanning our Old Testament, we find that it divides roughly into three sections. The first five books, written by Moses, were the only Scriptures Israel had for many years and were referred to as the law. Then there were the books that contained the inspired record of God's dealings with Israel-the Books of Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, etc. These were called the writings. Then there were the prophets-Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and other stalwart men of God who stood fearlessly as His spokesmen. Several centuries before Christ, Ezra, the royal scribe, and his associates gathered together all the copies of the law and of the prophecies they could find. And shortly thereafter the books of the Old Testament were compiled and arranged much as we know them today.

At the time of Christ these were the Scriptures used. When Jesus quoted Scripture, it was Old Testament Scripture, for the New had not yet been written. It was after our Lord's departure that faithful disciples recorded the story of His life. We call these careful and inspired accounts the Gospels. Then a large portion of our New Testament is made up of letters written by Paul and other leaders of the early church to the companies of believers they had raised up. The Gospels, the letters, and the Book of Revelation, by common consent of the early church under the inspiration and direction of the Holy Spirit, became our New Testament. But now you ask the question that has troubled thousands before you. "Do we still have the actual manuscripts of Peter and Paul, of Matthew and Mark, of Jeremiah and Ezekiel? If not, how do we know that the Scriptures as we have them today are accurate? Is there not the possibility that error may have crept in?"

That straight question brings us back to the Bedouin discovery -a discovery that has fortified the faith of millions in the Book. Most famous of the Dead Sea Scrolls, and by far the most complete, has been the Isaiah scroll. In an almost perfect state of preservation, it is inscribed on seventeen sheets of leather sewn together into a length of almost twenty-three feet. And it contains the entire text of the Book of Isaiah, from the first verse to the last. Other caves in the vicinity have yielded thousands of fragments belonging to hundreds of manuscripts. These have enabled scholars to account for practically every book in the Old Testament.

But why all the excitement? Why such unusual interest in these scrolls-particularly the Isaiah scroll? Simply this. It is clear beyond any reasonable doubt that the Isaiah scroll was written before the time of Christ. You see, before the discovery of this scroll nothing even approaching an original Old Testament manuscript was available to us. The best we could expect was only a copy of a copy of a copy-no one knew how many copies. And always there was that recurring question: What may have happened to the accuracy of the text through all the centuries of copying?

Planet in Rebellion

We had many prized manuscripts, both Creek and Hebrew, in our possession. For instance, there were treasured old Samaritan documents. There was the manuscript at St. Catherine's Monastery on the slope of Mount Sinai. There was the one, even more valuable, rescued from a wastebasket at St. Catherine's and now on display in the British Museum and many more. The oldest of the Creek (New Testament) manuscripts dated from the third century after Christ. But the oldest Hebrew (Old Testament) manuscript in our possession was a copy made six centuries later.

Therefore the Isaiah scroll brings us in one stroke a thousand years closer to the Bible writers than any Hebrew Old Testament manuscript so far known. And, most important, careful examination reveals that the text of this two-thousand-year-old manuscript is substantially identical with the Book of Isaiah as it reads in your Bible and mine! No, we do not have the original manuscripts of Isaiah or Jeremiah or Job or the apostles. But when by way of these breathtaking discoveries we are privileged to actually handle Hebrew copies from the time of our Lord or earlier, and then compare them with ours, we can know-we need not speculate-we can know that God has preserved His Word through the ages. In fact, one New Testament manuscript brings us within thirty years of the writer himself.

What does this mean to you? It means that if your faith has been shaken in the reliability of the Bible record, you can well afford to readjust your thinking in support of the Good Book again. The earth has yielded treasures in clay. And doubt retreats in embarrassment! Yes, the Bible claims to be the Word of God. And tightly rolled scrolls, resting through the centuries in their jars of clay, are an evidence that it must be. But-I ask it reverently-does it prove experimentally to be the Word of God?

Come with me to a tiny island set like a jewel in the South Pacific. Who doesn't remember the story of the mutiny on the Bounty? But did you know that this intriguing story has not ended yet? It is a fascinating tale that centers around the old and treasured Bible found in a battered sea chest taken from the Bounty. Captain Bligh had sailed the Bounty to Tahiti. And then he, with eighteen of his men, had been set adrift. The mutineers, with men and women whom they had persuaded to accompany them from Tahiti, landed on tiny Pitcairn Island, burned the ship, and were not discovered for many years.

The early days of Pitcairn were a story of drunken revelry and murder-a tale too horrible to describe. At last only one of the mutineers-John Adams was left. Surrounded by the children of the fugitives, himself the only link between those young people and a frightful future, John Adams felt a solemn responsibility. But what could he do? He turned to the only book on the island, aside from a hymnbook the Bible which had lain unmolested through the years at the bottom of the old sea chest. He read it. He read it to the children. He made it the center of their education. A church was built, and a school. As a result, every inhabitant of Pitcairn Island is a Christian-all because of the Book.

Today, as we near the close of the second century since the Bounty yielded its Bible to an island of fugitives, not one boat, but many giant vessels and luxury yachts stop to visit this little paradise in the Pacific. Travelers on the passing ships purchase their fruits, their souvenirs, from the islanders, who come out to meet them. They are loaded with flowers as the long boats leave again for Pitcairn. And floating across the waves can be heard the voices of the islanders as they sing their parting hymn:

"In the sweet by and by,
We shall meet on that beautiful shore."

Such is the transforming power of the Book of books. You, too, may know that power. You can know the experimental evidence that the Bible is all that it claims to be. You can know-in your heart of hearts-that it is the living God who speaks. As Columbus skirted the shores of the New World, he approached the mouth of the River Orinoco. It was suggested that they faced an island. But said the famed discoverer, "No such river flows from an island. That mighty torrent must drain the waters of a continent!"

Just so, the more you personally read the Book of God, reverently permitting it to speak to your mind and heart, the more you will know that it does not come from the empty hearts of impostors, but that it springs from the depths of eternal love and wisdom. Like the fugitives of Pitcairn, you will find it penetrating, healing truth-truth that unshackles and releases the chains of sin and restlessness in the lives of men. No wonder Jesus said, "The truth shall make you free!"

Before another day begins-another day with its rush and tension and care-guard well a few quiet moments. Let the Word of God speak to your soul, let its wisdom refresh your mind, and let its message win. For "it is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God."