

Questions/answers on the Bible

by James Blaine Chapman

James Blaine Chapman addresses common questions about the Bible's inspiration, authenticity, and translations, affirming its reliability as God's Word.

Scripture: Psalm 12:6, Psalm 119:105, Proverbs 30:5, Isaiah 40:8, Matthew 24:35, John 17:17, Romans 15:4, 2 Timothy 3:16, Hebrews 4:12

Topics: "Biblical Inspiration", "Scripture Translation"

Description

James Blaine Chapman addresses concerns about the English Bible's inspiration, emphasizing that while the original Scriptures in Hebrew and Greek were inspired by God, English translations may have minor errors but do not affect vital history, doctrine, or duty. He explains the importance of accurate translations based on original languages and the need for revisions due to language changes over time. Chapman asserts that the English Bible remains dependable and trustworthy for understanding God's will and the way to salvation, highlighting the clarity and accuracy of the translations for English-speaking nations.

Transcript

QUESTION #1 -- I have sometimes been troubled over questions arising regarding our English Bible. As a child I thought our English Bible was inspired word by word by the Spirit of the Lord. When I found that the Bible was originally written in Hebrew and Greek and translated into English by mere men, I was puzzled. Then when I found scholars claim some translations are more or less inaccurate, and that some passages, like John 8:1-11, do not have authority in the original at all, and that there are a good many English translations, I was still very much troubled. Finally, I have come to the place where I think I may state my faith as follows: I believe that the Holy Scriptures as found in the original languages were verbally and literally inspired by the Spirit of God, and that although there are some minor errors and uncertainties in our English translation, yet no vital history, doctrine or duty is affected thereby, and that therefore our English Bible is dependable and trustworthy. Do you think this statement a sound and proper one?

ANSWER #1 -- Yes, I think that is a very good way to state it. The strictest sense of inspiration must apply alone to the original words in which the Holy Scriptures appeared. Providentially, the languages in which the Scriptures originally appeared became "dead languages" soon after the Bible was completed, and have remained stationary ever since, so that the original sources are dependable, as would not have been the case if Hebrew and Greek had continued as growing languages among men.

Translations into the living languages of men, to be accurate, must, first of all, be based upon the original languages, and in the second place must be correct in the current languages in which the translations appear. This is obviously a task for scholars from both considerations. In the first place, none of the original manuscripts (for you know the printing press is relatively a modern invention) are in existence -- not even any of the books of the New Testament. The very earliest date from the fourth century after the birth of Christ.

So that as time passes new sources are discovered in the matter of manuscripts and quotations in literature other than the Scriptures themselves. All these must be considered in the endeavor to find just precisely what word the Holy Spirit used in the revelation of God's will to man. Then the living language into which the translation is made must be considered, for translation has regard for the accuracy of the current, as well as of the "dead language." When the committee on revision did its work in the last century, bringing out what is now called, "The Revised Version," and a little later, "The American Revised Version," it was claimed they discovered more than two thousand errors in our Authorized Version which was translated in 1611.

But many of these "errors" were occasioned by changes in the English language since the former translation appeared. In 1611, for example, which was used for persons as well as for things, prevent meant precede, ear meant plow, let meant hinder, and Ghost meant Spirit. But in the nearly three hundred years these words became obsolete and translation required the use of words which English speaking people understood. This was no fault of the original languages, and no fault of the translators of 1611.

And if the world stands, the English language will change some more and other words will become obsolete. And it is like this with all living and growing languages. Only a very few changes were based upon newly discovered manuscripts. And, as you suggest, no vital history, doctrine, or practice of the Christian religion was affected. The majority of us do not understand our own language fully. And of course the ancients had the same difficulties with their languages -- they were not all scholars by any means.

So I think we may confidently affirm that we have in the English a Bible that is every bit as clear and accurate for us as the original Scriptures were to the people to whom they were given, and there is not the slightest occasion for us to question or debate the full inspiration of its words. There is not a vital question of any kind that is not made clear enough in our English to enable the sincere to find the way of salvation and the road to heaven. As originally found, the Scriptures were not divided into chapters and verses.

Some of the books were written in capital letters without spacing between the words. We may therefore say that even these conveniences are not inspired. And yet we appreciate them as helping us to read more easily and to locate climactic statements amidst the whole body of sacred truth. Perhaps I might add my own testimony which is that my study of the original and of other languages has served rather to increase my regard for our English Bible, and to compel me to feel that the translators were guided by a light of higher origin than their mere human understanding.

I think, also, that this is the common experience of others. Therefore, having somewhat examined the originals, we come back more assured than ever and hold up the English Bible and say, "This is the Word of God." Not simply that it "contains the Word of God," but that it is the Word of God in very truth.

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QUESTION #2 -- At the Sunday school this morning there was a question on the authenticity of the Bible. Suppose I am an atheist, and ask you for external proof that the Bible is the Word of God, how would you answer?

ANSWER #2 -- I think I would start with the probability of a revelation of God's will to men, and would argue that the wisdom of God and man's need and capacity to know all speak of the probability of such a revelation. Then I would go on to say that nature does not reveal the principal things we need to know, as, the moral character of God and man's origin, duty and destiny; that left to themselves men invariably drift into uncertainty and all around deterioration. I would meet all claims that science or art can be God's method of revelation by showing that these are insufficient because they do not speak a language that common people can understand. Thus I would shut the problem up to the fact that either the Bible is God's revelation to man or else there is no such revelation. Either God has spoken through His written Word or He has not spoken at all. It is either the Bible and Christianity or darkness and death, and men intuitively draw back from darkness and death, so the probability and desirability are both in favor of the Bible. That is to say it is not the Bible or something better, rather it is the Bible or nothing at all. Then I would present the Bible and show that it does reveal the moral character of God. It does reveal to man what he needs to know about his origin, his duty and his destiny. Wherever it has been received the hopes of men individually have become bright and the economic, intellectual, social and moral life of the people has reached its highest and best form. I would contrast this with the state of men in lands where the Bible is unknown or disregarded. Then I would show how persistent the Bible has been to be able to outlive all its persecutors. I would show how its prophecies have been verified, its history has been substantiated by spade and stone, its science has never been outgrown, and its morality has gone in advance of every code of ethics that has yet appeared among men. And finally, I would conclude, as Paul so often did, by presenting the results of my own test tube experience in the laboratory of personal religion. This is as valid as the exhibits of the geologist or the psychologist. I would be fair and rational, but I would be firm and unwavering in declaring that I have met God in just the way the Bible says one may meet Him, and that I have proved the Bible to be the Word of God and true just as the mathematician has proved his answers and as the scientist has proved the theories of philosophy, and I would pray God to give you spiritual understanding Do you think I would be able to convince you?

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QUESTION #3 -- How many versions of the Bible are there? Why so many? What is the limit or end?

ANSWER #3 -- I suppose your question has reference only to the English Bible, and I answer it with this understanding. There is the Douay version used by the Roman Catholics, so-called from the town in which the Committee held its principal sessions. This version is based upon the Vulgate or Latin translation of the Hebrew Old Testament and Greek New Testament. Then there is the Authorized Version, translated out of the original Hebrew and Greek by a committee raised by King James of England, and made available in 1611. The Revised Version, and twenty years later, the American Revised Version, came out in the latter half of the last century. The need for this new version (for there can scarcely be said to be two -- the differences are too slight) was said to rest upon the fact that earlier and more dependable manuscripts had been found since 1611, and the further fact that the English language has passed through some radical changes, making the language current in 1611 scarcely understandable, in some important instances, to present day readers. These are all the versions commonly accepted among church scholars, although others, like Moffatt, have published the results of their researches in more or less popular forms. As to the limit on the number of versions, that of course cannot be determined. There has

been talk of another version being useful, but there is no general demand for it, and it seems likely now that there will be no movement in that direction for some generations to come. In fact, the trend, as I think, is rather toward the discarding of later versions in favor of the Authorized, which, after all, is a very fine translation, and the instances in which scholars suggest changes are in such incidentals that not a single fundamental doctrine or serious practice is affected. Perhaps no people in the history of the world ever had so fine, clear, dependable translation of the Scriptures into the language "wherein they were born" as is the heritage of the English speaking nations of the world.

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QUESTION #4 -- Why were the books of the Apocrypha once included in the King James Version of the Bible, and why are they now rejected?

ANSWER #4 -- These books were never included "in the King James Version of the Bible," although they have sometimes been bound under the same cover with the Bible; for always there was a clear distinction in the character of the books. The canon of the Holy Scriptures was settled a long time before the Scriptures were translated into English. The reason the Apocrypha is not usually included in the same cover with the Bible is that people, as a rule, do not take interest in these writings and do not care to have their Bibles cluttered up with them. These writings have some value, just as religious and semi-religious writings of any period have value, but they are so far beneath the plane of our inspired Bible that they do not deserve to be bound with it or mentioned in the same sentence with it.

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QUESTION #5 -- Please read Joshua 10:12, 13; Psalm 19:6, and then tell us does the Bible teach that the sun moves and not the earth?

ANSWER #5 -- The Bible is written in popular language not in technical language. And in popular language the sun rises and sets, for popular language describes the experience of the speaker and not the cause of his experience. There is nothing in the Bible inconsistent with the idea of a round world and of revolving planets. In fact there is not a proved fact of science that is at variance with the Bible. It is only the ideas that men read into the Bible and the presumptions of science that are contradictory.

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QUESTION #6 -- What does the word Amen signify? Where is it first used in the Bible? Do we sanction or obligate when we say Amen? At the close of the Lord's prayer in Matthew 6:13, what is the meaning of the word there? What is the relation of "Even so, come, Lord Jesus" to the Amen in Revelation?

ANSWER #6 -- The word Amen appears for the first time in the Bible in Numbers 5:22 where the woman in the trial for jealousy is instructed to use it in repeated form in connection with the curse which is to come if she is guilty. Here, in most solemn form, the meaning evidently is, "Let it be so." The Popular and Critical Bible Encyclopedia has this to say on the subject: "This word is strictly an adjective, signifying firm, and metaphorically, faithful. Thus in Revelation 3:14; our Lord is called the Amen, the faithful and true witness. In Isaiah 65:16 the Hebrew has 'the God of Amen,' which our version renders 'the God of truth,' that is, of fidelity. In its adverbial sense Amen means certainly, truly, surely. It is used in beginning of a sentence by way of emphasis -rarely in the Old Testament (Jeremiah 28:6), but often by our Savior in the New, where it is commonly translated verily. In John's Gospel alone it is often used by Him in this way double, that is,

verily, verily. In the end of a sentence it often occurs singly or repeatedly, especially at the end of hymns or prayers, as 'amen and amen' (Psalm 41:13; 72:19; 89:53). The proper significance of it in this position is to confirm the words which have preceded, and invoke the fulfillment of them, 'so be it,' fiat; Septuagint genoito. Hence in oaths, after the priest has repeated the words of the covenant or imprecation, all those who pronounce the 'amen' bind themselves by the oath (Numbers 5:22; Deut. 22:15-17; Neh. 5:13; 8:6; I Chronicles 16:36; compare Psalm 106:48).

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QUESTION #7 -- Does the number forty in the Bible have any special significance? If 80, what is it?

ANSWER #7 -- Terry says, "The number forty designates in so many places the duration of a penal judgment, either forty days or forty years, that it may be regarded as symbolic of a period of judgment. The forty days of the flood (Genesis 7:4, 12, 17), the forty years of Israel's wandering in the wilderness (Numbers 14:34), the forty stripes with which a convicted criminal was to be beaten (Deuteronomy 25:3), the forty days and nights during which Moses, Elijah and Jesus fasted (Exodus 24:28; I Kings 19:8; Matthew 4: 2), all favor this idea. But there is no reason to suppose that in these cases the number forty is not also used in its proper and literal sense. The symbolism, if any, arises from the association of the number with a period of punishment or trial."

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