

CHAPTER VI

ERRORS OF COPYISTS AND TRANSLATORS

Some difficulties in the Bible may be due to errors made by men who copied the manuscripts or by those who translated the original Hebrew and Greek into English. We need to realize that the original manuscripts of the books that compose the Bible no longer exist. The original manuscripts were copied many times and though they were copied with great care and exactness, some minor errors crept into the copies that were made. But through careful study, we can know what the original text was.

The errors due to copyists are trivial for all practical purposes. In the Old Testament, they usually are in relation to numbers and the spelling of names-- technical points that have no bearing on salvation and the purpose of life. Errors in figures would be easy to make, especially since Hebrew figures are made by using letters of the alphabet--letters that appear very much alike in many cases. As an example, the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet represents the number one. With two little points above it no larger than flyspecks, the number becomes a thousand. A copyist need only to make a very slight error to make a great change in figures.

There appears to be a copyist's error in II Chronicles 36:9 compared to II Kings 24:8, regarding the age of Jehoiachin when he began to reign. Eighteen is correct as given in the book of Kings. The Amplified Bible translates II Chronicles 36:9 as: "Jehoichin was eight [teen] years old then; he reigned three months and ten days in Jerusalem." The Hebrew letter for the numeral ten seems to have been dropped by the copyist.

But we must be sure there truly is a copyist's error. The numbers given in II Samuel 24:9 appear to contradict those in I Chronicles 21:5. By examining them more closely, however, we see that in all of Israel there were 1,100,000 fighting men--of which 800,000 were "valiant" men. There were 500,000 men in all of Judah, but only 470,000 were fighting men. Therefore, 30,000 were non-combatants--priests, Levites, etc. There is thus no copyist's error in these verses.

Many other examples of difficulties connected with numbers could be given. But they do not affect the overall inspiration of the Bible. As Tuck explains:

But when all the cases are carefully reviewed, the impression is left on the devout reader that they concern only the literature of the book, and in no way affect its value as a revelation of Divine moral and religious truth. The utmost that can be said is that there are flaws in the frame of the picture, but common sense recognizes that flaws in the frame do not, in any way, affect the artistic truth and value of the picture. Only hard and fast--and therefore unreasonable--notions of Divine inspiration could lead

us to expect absolute accuracy in matters of mere detail, in which human skill was competent to act, and inspiration need not be concerned. (Robert Tuck, A Handbook of Scientific and Literary Bible Difficulties, p. 401.)

Men can make wrong estimates of numbers killed in a battle. They can copy records from State archives and make mistakes in the copying. We cannot expect God's Spirit to guide all men who make estimates on battle fields, who undertake the census of a population, or who copy a public document. God allowed this ordinary human element to creep into His Word. And when the Scriptures had to be copied by hand, errors in copying could occur.

But these trivial errors do not in any way affect what the Bible says about morals, religious doctrine or God's plan of salvation. Although there are minor errors in the text, there is not one important doctrine that hangs upon any doubtful reading of the text. "The highest authorities assure us that, in regard to the New Testament, the variations of any importance introduced by copyists amount to less than one-thousandth of the entire text; while the Hebrew documents of the Old Testament show even less variation still" (Sidney Collett, Scripture of Truth, p. 17).

Errors in Translation

More serious are the errors of the translators--

the men who translated the Hebrew and Greek texts into English. Translations of the Bible were not inspired by God. Even though they are done by men with academic ability, accurate translation is a complex matter. Tuck explains why:

It is seizing precisely the thought for which an author finds an adequate form of expression in his language, and finding for that thought an expression which shall be as adequate and precise for our language as his form of expression was for his language. (Robert Tuck, Handbook of Scientific and Literary Bible Difficulties, p. 478.)

Therefore, in some cases the English translation gives a wrong meaning to the words or expressions of the original Hebrew or Greek. One such glaring error is in Matthew 12:40 where we read that Jonah was swallowed by a "whale." Perhaps there are types of whales that can swallow a man, but, in any case, this is not an accurate translation. The original Greek word means "great sea creature." Christ was referring to Jonah 1:17 which says it was a "great fish" that swallowed Jonah.

Discrepancies may frequently appear in the King James Version when none actually exist in the original text. This is because the translators have used the same English word to represent several Hebrew or Greek terms.

For example, Luke 13:24 would appear to contradict II Timothy 2:24 because of how the word "strive" is used. Different Greek words are used, but translated the same.

The term in Timothy should have been translated "fight" or "quarrel."

What is the Literal Meaning?

To solve these difficulties with the translation: find out the exact and LITERAL meaning of the original text. Acts 12:4 mentions the word "Easter," but is that the exact meaning of the original Greek? No! The original Greek word is pascha and is translated as "pass-over" in every other place it is used in the New Testament.

False teachers use Revelation 20:10 to prove that people are tormented in an ever-burning hellfire. But any word in the King James Version that is written in italics is not in the original text. Italicized words have been supplied by the translators to clarify the meaning in English. In some cases, however, the meaning has been perverted.

Notice that the word "are" in Revelation 20:10 is in italics. The correct word should be "were" or "were cast." The devil will be cast into the lake of fire "where the beast and the false prophet were cast, and [the devil] shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever."

Marginal Renderings and Footnotes

All good Bibles have marginal notes or a center reference column. This can be a very useful and valuable aid to the Bible student. This column contains different renderings of words and phrases that are either the literal translation of the Hebrew or Greek where the English idiom requires a different form of expression, or are alternative translations in doubtful cases. In most cases the meaning will not vary to any great extent. But in some cases the marginal rendering will clarify a scripture without having to check a concordance or lexicon.

One example is found in Hebrews 2:14 which some use to prove that Satan the devil will be destroyed. The word "destroy," however, is in question. One Oxford edition of the King James Version uses numbers by words in the text to denote renderings given in the center reference column.

By the word "destroy" is the number 5. When we find the number 5 in the center reference column, we see a note which says, "Or annul." In other words, the Greek word translated "destroy" in Hebrews 2:14 could also be translated, as it is in other places, "make of no effect," or "make avoid."

Christ will annul Satan's power, make him of no effect. Satan will be made powerless, all his power and

authority stripped from him by Jesus Christ at His return. This verse in Hebrews 2:14 does not teach that Satan will be literally destroyed (see Mr. Armstrong's article, "Satan's Fate").

Another example is in Luke 17:21 which some people take to mean that God's kingdom is set up in our hearts. First of all, they don't realize that Christ was talking to the Pharisees. Is the kingdom of God "within" the Pharisees? Of course not. The marginal rendering is, "in the midst of you." The representative of God's coming kingdom, Jesus Christ, was right there among the Pharisees--not in them.

Kinds of Marginal Renderings

The center reference column also gives references of Old Testament passages that are quoted in the New Testament. Various editions of the Bible, of course, will differ as to what material is given in the center column, but generally the marginal references will fall into seven classifications as given by Anstey:

1. Quotations or direct citations of one passage of Scripture in another passage.
2. Parallels, in which there is a certain similarity of thought or expression in two independent passages.
3. Illustrations, in which one passage throws a certain measure of light upon the meaning of another.
4. Explanations, in which the meaning of the original is further elucidated and defined.

5. Interpretations, or fulfilments, in which the meaning of the original is further developed, additional or further truth being incorporated with the truth expressed in the original.

6. Adaptations, in which the original thought is modified and exhibited in relation to some new set of circumstances.

7. Applications, in which a general truth is brought to bear upon the circumstances of some particular occasion. (Martin Anstey, How to Master the Bible, pp. 114-119.)

Summaries of Chapters

The summaries of chapters in the authorized King James Version are not in the original manuscripts and, therefore, are without authority and not inspired. Some are attempted explanations as in the case of the Song of Solomon. Others are not wholly accurate. For these reasons, chapter summaries cannot always be relied on.

The system of dividing the Bible into chapters and verses also was not inspired by God. Chapters and verses are helpful in finding passages in the Bible, but this system of division has often obscured the meaning of Scriptures by breaking sentences in the middle or by separating thoughts that should be joined together. Too many people merely lift a verse out of its setting and read a false meaning into it because they don't read the context in surrounding verses.

Some of the chapter divisions are inaccurate and tend to break the story flow. Matthew 16:28 puzzles many

people because of this. There shouldn't be a chapter break after this verse. If a person continues to read, he can find what Christ meant when He said, "There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom."

The answer is in chapter 17, verse 9. The disciples saw a vision in which Christ appeared in His glorified state--as He will be when He returns to set up His kingdom.

Because of such imperfections, a new system of supplementing the chapter-verse division with paragraph arrangements has been adopted in many of the newer revisions and translations of the Bible. This often helps the reader to better comprehend the subject matter.

CHAPTER VII

MORAL DIFFICULTIES

The so-called "moral difficulties" are some of the most perplexing ones found in the Old Testament. They include the practice of slavery, polygamy, warfare and acts of treachery, deception and cruelty. But they can be solved by applying a few basic principles.

We need to first realize that God did not reveal His complete plan and will for mankind all at once. God's Revelation was given in stages. Much of what was revealed by Christ and the apostles in the New Testament was not available to those in Old Testament times. Tuck points this out by saying:

The so-called "moral difficulties" of the Old Testament Scriptures are, to a very large extent, created by those who cannot recognize that Divine revelation has been given to men in stages, with an evident progression towards completeness, and in each stage with precise adaptation to the associations and the capabilities of the age (Robert Tuck, A Handbook of Biblical Difficulties, p. 11).

God allowed ancient Israel to follow certain customs existing in the society of that time. They were not altogether good and will not exist in God's Kingdom during the coming World Tomorrow when people are converted to a more perfect way of life. But God permitted these customs, and outright sins in some cases, until the

people were ready to adopt a better way. As Tuck further says, "Many of the permitted things of the Old Testament are allowed because of their agreement with man's accepted bye-laws, and not because they are absolutely right" (Ibid., p. 13).

Why God Permitted Slavery

The practice of slavery is an example of what God allowed, but which is something that will not be a part of a perfect society. Slavery was so universal among the nations at that time and so deeply seated, it was not practical to do away with it all at once. So God, for the time being, permitted slavery but carefully protected the rights of Hebrew slaves and even made the life of foreign slaves far more pleasant than was the case elsewhere.

God gave judgments to regulate slavery and to prevent the worst abuses and evils of it from affecting the Israelites. Harsh treatment and strictness was definitely prohibited (Lev. 25:43, 46, 53 compared with Ex. 1:13, 14).

God's way is to eliminate the causes of slavery. While slavery probably began with the custom of taking captives in war, it later was mostly the result of poverty. Slavery was the chief refuge of the poor, weak and unfortunate since there was no welfare plan like the

Western nations have today. If a man could not pay off his debts, he could sell himself and his family as slaves (Lev. 25:39, 47; II Kings 4:1).

Since slavery was so common, there was little stigma and degradation attached to it. Slaves were regarded as true members of the family. Although they had no civil rights, they nevertheless were regarded as fellowmen with full religious rights. The Israelite in such a condition was not even to consider himself as a slave or "bond-servant," but as a "hired servant" or free wage-earner (Lev. 25:39, 40).

Even in the New Testament, slavery is accepted and no where abolished. Jesus Christ did not come the first time to alter social customs, to change governments or to introduce a new society. He came to preach the Gospel--to teach principles of a new way to live. He revealed the truth. He explained the purpose of life.

But neither Christ, or His apostles openly advocated the overthrow of slavery. Yet, their teachings had an influence in overcoming slavery and its hardship. Although slavery among the Jews had disappeared by the time of Christ, some of the Gentile Christians were holders of slaves--such as Philemon--and others were slaves themselves. Since slavery was a common practice under the Roman government, the apostle Paul gives many

instructions to the Christians living in this situation (Col. 4:1; Eph. 6:5-9; I Tim. 6:1-2; Titus 2:9-10; I Cor. 7:20-24).

Polygamy and Divorce

Polygamy is another practice which God allowed, but no where sanctioned or approved. The legal statutes made it illegal in ancient Israel, but if a man insists on breaking God's laws and committing this sin, God allows it although He will punish the transgressor. There's a penalty to pay for any sin committed. So it is with polygamy.

When the Biblical record is closely examined, it is evident that Abraham was not a polygamist. David was before his conversion, but completely repented of it later. Jacob was left with only one wife after his conversion (see Mr. Armstrong's article, "Here's the PLAIN Truth About Old Testament Polygamy"). We must consider when the act took place in a man's life before making a proper evaluation of his character. Yes, there was polygamy in ancient Israel, but it was a sin which God condemned. He never sanctioned it, but always punished those who practiced it.

The Israelites also practiced divorce and remarriage. God never legalized this practice, but Moses

allowed it because of the hardness of their hearts--their disobedient minds (Matt. 19:8-9). This was Christ's response to the question asked by the Pharisees: "Why did Moses then command [emphasis ours] to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?" (verse 7). But they were wrong. Moses didn't command them to divorce. Christ corrected the Pharisees by saying Moses "suffered" or allowed divorce.

The Pharisees were referring to the law given in Deuteronomy 24:1-4. Even in the King James Version these verses seem to imply that the people were commanded or instructed to divorce. But the Jewish translation gives a better rendering:

When a man taketh a wife, and marrieth her, then it cometh to pass, if she find no favour in his eyes, because he hath found some unseemly thing in her, that he writeth her a bill of divorcement, and giveth it in her hand, and sendeth her out of his house, and she departeth out of his house, and goeth and becometh another man's wife, and the latter husband hateth her, and writeth her a bill of divorcement, and giveth it in her hand, and sendeth her out of his house; or if the latter husband die, who took her to be his wife; her former husband who sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after that she is defiled; for that is abomination before the LORD; and thou shalt not cause the land to sin, which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance.

There is no command to divorce given here. The judgment of the law is in verse 4 and concerns what is forbidden after a man marries a woman, becomes displeased with her, gives her a bill of divorce and another man

does the same to her. When and if that happens, the law forbade her to remarry her first husband. This was to check a hasty divorce and prevent further degradation. The man had to consider the consequences. Once he divorced his wife and she remarried, there was no chance for him to get her back even though her second husband divorced her.

Christ taught plainly against divorce which is actually the same as polygamy. Instead of having more than one wife, a man who has married, divorced and remarried, has an actual wife and a discarded wife. The Bible makes it plain that polygamy or divorce is nothing less than adultery and a violation of the seventh commandment (Ex. 20:14; Rom. 7:2-3).

Why God sent Israel to War

Both the Old and New Testament explain that warfare is not God's Way. It is the transgression of the sixth commandment: "Thou shalt not kill." It is contrary to Christ's teaching to love our enemies and it destroys faith in God to protect us and fight our battles for us.

Why, then, did God command Israel to fight against its enemies? Since Israel lacked faith and would not trust God to fight their battles for them, they became a warfaring nation. God allowed them to make this decision

just as He allows individuals to sin and allows nations to go to war. He permits it, but doesn't approve it.

But even though God allowed Israel to go to war, He still wanted His purpose to be carried out. He wanted the Israelites--the descendants of Abraham--to take over and settle in the land He promised Abraham.

As Mr. Armstrong explains in his booklet, "Military Service and War," since Israel had made the decision to be a fighting nation, "God used them to do the fighting in driving out the inhabitants illegally possessing the land God had allotted to Abraham's descendants. Consequently God gave orders for them to do what fighting--and killing --was necessary to accomplish God's PURPOSE of putting them in the land of Promise!" (p. 33).

But even though God allowed it, that didn't make warfare right. It still was a sin which God permitted because He created men as free moral agents. God's purpose is to develop righteous character in mankind and this requires free moral agency.

So God used Israel to accomplish His purpose of exterminating the Gentile inhabitants of the Promised Land. This is why He ordered them to go to war. He told them to do what was required to fulfil His purpose. This is God's prerogative since He has the right to take human life. He merely used Israel as His instrument and executioner.

The actions of the prophets and kings must be regarded in this light. Since Israel was a warfaring nation, they used strategy, deception and fighting skills to overcome their enemies. So Elisha deceived the King of Syria by strategem (II Kings 6:19). David's treatment of the Moabites (II Sam. 8:2) was right according to the rules and customs of warfare. All of them could have been killed, but David, through mercy, spared a full third of them.

Sinful Actions of Righteous Men

People are shocked and bewildered when they read of the sins committed by the prophets and kings in the Old Testament. How could such righteous men like David, Abraham, and Moses--men God used--commit such atrocious acts as are described in detail?

The Bible, like no other book, contains moral teaching. It tells us how to live rightly in obedience to God and His laws. The Bible teaches by giving examples of what happened when men disobeyed God. It graphically portrays the end result of sin. By reading these examples, we should know how to avoid the same pitfalls and making the same mistakes (I Cor. 10:6-14).

Both good and bad points in a man's character are revealed in the Bible. His faults, failings and sins as

well as virtues are there for all to see. Tuck gives the reason why:

The direct relations of Scripture to the teaching of morals comes out in nothing so impressively as in the fact that the character and conduct of the persons introduced are fully and honestly detailed. In the ordinary biographies of gifted and good people we always have one-sided pictures. The human faults are hidden or slurred over, and palliated. . . . Exactly the opposite is true of the Scriptures. Their mission is moral; so they give us the men as they really were, and expect us to call their moral failings by their right names, and to learn from their sins as well as from their virtues. (Robert Tuck, A Handbook of Biblical Difficulties, p. 14.)

Abraham was a man of great faith. But the Bible records a time when he lacked faith and committed a sin. When he instructed Sarah his wife to tell the Egyptians she was his sister (Gen. 12:11-33), he not only told her to lie but showed by this action that he lacked faith in God to preserve both himself and Sarah from the dangers confronting them in Egypt. This God did in spite of Abraham's transgression and weakness.

Moses' impulsiveness is illustrated on three occasions: (1) when he slew the Egyptian (Ex. 2:11-12), (2) when he dashed down the tables on which were written the Ten Commandments (Ex. 32:19) and (3) when he smote the rock twice at Meribah, instead of only speaking to it as God commanded (Num. 20:3-13).

Gideon had good intentions but did wrong by trying to take the arrangement of the religious affairs into his

own hands (Judges 8:27). This act influenced all Israel to go a whoring after false gods.

Then we come to the example of David -- called "a man after God's own heart" (I Sam. 13:14). His sins and weaknesses are vividly illustrated. But so are his good points. God recorded David's sin of adultery and his subsequent killing of Uriah the Hittite so he could have Uriah's wife Bathsheba for himself. But He also recorded his deep repentance (Psa. 51) in order that we might learn a valuable lesson from it. That lesson shows how merciful and long-suffering God is towards His people, and how much He is willing to forgive us if only we will recognize and rightly value the great sacrifice that Christ made to atone for our sins.

David's sin of numbering the people (II Samuel 24:1-17) puzzles some people. David's census was a sin, but it is not always wrong to take a census. The purpose of the census is what must be considered. Remember, Moses also numbered Israel (Ex. 30:12), but that census was directed by God for the purpose of obtaining money for building the tabernacle. That census was not wrong.

The census instituted by David was wrong, however. First, notice that Satan, not God, provoked David to number Israel (I Chron. 21:1). The census was inspired by Satan the Devil rather than God. Secondly, the sin of

David consisted in its being for the purpose of knowing how many warriors were available for some meditated plan of conquest. Notice that the military leader, Joab, directed this census. If David trusted in God to fight his battles, the number of warriors would not be necessary to be known. If David could know how many warriors he had in comparison with his enemy (I Chron. 21:3), that would satisfy his pride and vanity.

Thirdly, the census enabled David to institute a permanent system of taxation which was regarded, at that time, as a reproach upon the freedom of the people and not to be used by the king of Israel. For these three reasons, God regarded this census taken by David as a sin. David repented of this sin, however, but not before many thousands of people were killed because of it (I Chron. 21 and II Sam. 24).

Acts of Treachery

Ehud's treacherous assassination of Eglon (Judges 3:15-21) presents another difficulty. If God raised up Ehud to deliver Israel, how could he do such a thing? There is no doubt that treachery and assassination are wrong in God's sight. Although God raised up Ehud as the deliverer of Israel, no directive was given to Ehud to do what he did. God's purpose, however, is carried out

through the actions of men whether they be good or bad.

Tuck comments on this point by saying:

It is not always sufficiently recognized that, in using men as the agents for carrying out His purposes, God employs mortal beings, who put character into the method of their obedience. God orders the thing, but man finds the particular way of doing it. And so God may approve and reward the thing done, and even punish the agent for the sin in his method of doing it. An illustration of this may be found in the story of the violent Jehu (Robert Tuck, A Handbook of Biblical Difficulties, p. 13).

The story of Jehu's slaughter of the Baal worshippers is found in II Kings 10:18-28. God allows His servants to devise their own methods in carrying out His will.

It will become clear that, in many cases, God can approve, and even reward, a man for the thing done, when He must disapprove, and even punish a man for, the spirit and manner in which he has done it (Ibid. p. 62).

There are acts of apparent cruelty that may be difficult to understand. The account of Elisha cursing little children (II Kings 2:23-24) is one. All becomes clear when we understand that "little children" should be translated "youths," that "thou bald head" was an insolent epithet of contempt, and that these juvenile delinquents were expressing the sneers and sarcasms of their idolatrous parents. God's judgment on them was to teach others to honor and respect the office of God's minister.

Is God Merciful?

When we see how God punished people or directed Israel to carry out the punishment, it appears that He is overly cruel and heartless. We must examine all the evidence to discern the real attitude of God.

Look at the destruction of the entire Canaanite population (Josh. 8:26-28). At first glance, it looks unmerciful. But, as Tuck says, "the national condition of the Canaanites called for an overwhelming national judgment" (Ibid., p. 27). And here again we must remember that God's purpose must be fulfilled. Before the Israelites could safely dwell in the Promised Land, that land had to be cleansed of its idolatry, idolatrous symbols and relics and even of the corrupt and perverted people. Torrey further explains:

First of all, let us say, it is certainly appalling that any people should be utterly put to the sword, not only the men of war, but the old men and old women as well, and the young women and children. But there is something more appalling than even this, when one stops to think about the matter, and that is that the iniquity of any people should have become so full, their rebellion against God so strong and so universal, their moral corruption and debasement so utter and so pervasive, even down to babes just born, as to make such treatment absolutely necessary in the interests of humanity (R. A. Torrey, Difficulties in the Bible, p. 48).

It was out of mercy and kindness to the nation of Israel and the human race that God caused this cancerous

and corrupt nation to be destroyed. If it had been allowed to remain, Israel would have been corrupted by it.

The destruction of Amalek (I Sam. 15:2-3) is said to be one of the most perplexing difficulties in God's Word. We need to realize that the Amalekites as a people had done wrong against Israel. God demanded that the death penalty be exacted by Israel. The death penalty required the death or destruction of the guilty race.

God Requires Exact Obedience

Many difficulties can be solved by realizing that God requires exact and complete obedience to His instructions and punishes the disobedient. Uzzah had good intentions when he tried to keep the Ark from falling, but he had to die because God's instructions were not obeyed. The fault was mainly David's and Uzzah suffered because of it.

He died to awaken David to the importance of exact obedience to God's injunctions. He was an example of disobedience in touching the Ark, for which the stumbling of the oxen seemed a good excuse. The example, and the judgment following, opened David's eyes to see his disobedience in putting the Ark on a cart, when God had commanded that it should only be carried on the shoulders of the Levites (Robert Tuck, A Handbook of Biblical Difficulties, p. 35).

Compare I Chronicles 13:1-14 with chapter 15:1-2, 11-15. Uzzah's good intentions didn't excuse the failure to obey exactly as God had instructed. And because Saul

also disobeyed God and chose to spare the condemned king Agag, Samuel as God's prophet had to carry out the sentence by hewing Agag in pieces (I Sam. 15:33). About this incident, Tuck says:

Man must obey God just as God commands. Exact, unquestioning obedience is so absolutely essential as the foundation of morals and character, that even a scene like this of the killing of Agag may be necessary to get it fixed on the mind of a king, of a nation, and through the Bible, of the world. . . . but we may fairly regard it as the striking dramatic teaching of the all-important truth, that if man proposes to obey God, he must obey thoroughly and precisely (Ibid. p. 48, emphasis mine).

Another incident is recorded in I Kings 13. A prophet from Judah was told not to eat and drink while performing his mission in Bethel. But a prophet from Bethel lied to him and said: "I am a prophet also as thou art; and an angel spake unto me by the word of the LORD, saying, Bring him back with thee into thine house, that he may eat bread and drink water" (I Kings 13:18).

Instead of obeying God's exact instructions, this prophet from Judah trusted in the words of a man. Because of his disobedience, he was killed by a lion and buried in Bethel. It sounds so harsh, but we need to learn the lesson brought out by Tuck:

God requires a strict, precise, minute, and entire obedience of His commands. When He speaks, man must do at once, exactly and without questioning, what He orders. He must be even obeyed in the precise way He directs. It is not enough for man to obey, but to choose his own times and ways. To teach this lesson God shows that He will not pass over even small

failures from obedience in His trusted and honoured servants (Ibid. p. 53, emphasis mine).

The prophet from Judah was deceived, but this chapter is not about deceivers. It is about those who don't perfectly obey God. The prophet from Judah didn't carry out God's precise instructions and was punished for it as a warning to us and to all ages. These examples are vital lessons to us who read about them. They are written and recorded for our admonition (I Cor. 10:11).

CHAPTER VIII

DIFFICULTIES IN PROPHECY

Some people may consider the study of prophecy as being a specialized type of study and too difficult for them. But the subject is both necessary and of absorbing interest when rightly pursued.

The apostle Peter (II Pet. 1:19) exhorts the believer to give heed to the "light" which prophecy sheds upon the otherwise obscure and mysterious plan of God.

The word "prophecy" in the Bible is used in a two-fold sense: (1) as meaning a forthtelling or an exposition of something; and then (2) as a foretelling or a prediction of some future event. A prophet is one who speaks for God or one who tells before--one who predicts, foretells, prophesies.

In other words, the prophet both preached and expounded God's Will and purpose in the immediate present and then of His future purpose still to be fulfilled. The first was given in order to warn and encourage to immediate obedience--the second to reveal His plans which would never fail even if His people failed.

Prophecy sheds light on the darkness of the past, present and future. Looking at the past, prophecy illuminates and interprets history. Prophecies often

reveal why certain events in Biblical history were allowed to happen as they did. The history of the Babylonian captivity is one example of this.

As related to the present, fulfilled prophecy provides one of the strongest proofs of the divine inspiration of the Word of God. The predictions about Tyre, Sidon, Egypt and Babylon were written or uttered centuries before they became facts in history. By comparing the prediction with its fulfillment, we see proof that the prophet was inspired by God. See Mr. Armstrong's booklet, Proof of the Bible for an exposition of these prophecies.

Prophecy for the future encourages hope for a better world and inspires faith. What still remains to be fulfilled will come to pass. Faith to believe this is based upon what has already been fulfilled.

Not all prophecies are merely foretellings of catastrophic events meted out by the wrathful vengeance of a harsh God. Many of the prophecies foretell a time of peace, of happiness, of restoration, of joy, of great prosperity and physical wealth for those who are serving God. Many prophecies merely foretell, in advance, certain events which are to happen--the rise and fall of nations, the course of world affairs.

What is Prophecy?

Prophecy is a chronicle or outline of the great plan God is working out here below. It describes this plan in detail. Prophecy is history written in advance.

History is a chronicle of human systems being cut off from God. It is a record of events that have befallen man as a result of his rebellion against God's government rather than submitting to it. World historians try to center their information around rulers, powers and wars. To a lesser extent they covered religion, economics, education, etc. They wrote a chronicle of civilization man built without God.

God controls the affairs of men and nations, but historians rarely see this control. God's historians--the prophets--write ahead of time showing where man would go, how God will intervene and the course that His Plan will take. Prophecy takes up where history leaves off. It is the continuation of history in advance.

God works out future history through human agencies, even though He intervenes. Since God knows human nature, He knew in advance what man would do and how He would intervene in human affairs. He uses Israel primarily as His tool and is only concerned with other nations as they come in contact with Israel.

Study Methods

The student of Biblical prophecy can use two study methods. He may take each prophetic book separately and examine and analyse its contents sentence by sentence. Or he may trace certain subjects through the Bible as a whole. It would be best to study the books first and subjects afterwards.

In dealing with the books, the question of their date has to be considered. They have to be studied, so far as possible, in chronological order and in connection with the history of the times in which they were written.

The prophetic books fall into three groups: First, there are those written before the Captivity. In the northern Kingdom of Israel were Jonah, Amos, Hosea and Micah. In the southern Kingdom of Judah were Joel, Isaiah, Obadiah, Nahum, Habbakuk, Zephaniah and Jeremiah (part). The second group was written during the Captivity. This includes Jeremiah (part), Ezekiel and Daniel. The third group was written after the Captivity and includes Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi.

The following order of study is the best to begin with: (1) Isaiah, Hosea and Micah, (2) Jeremiah, (3) Daniel and Ezekiel, (4) Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi.

Once we have a general idea of the date of the

writer, we can consider the subject matter, characteristics of each book, and its main subdivisions. Disregarding the divisions into chapters in some cases, study the book in portions according to the nature of their contents.

This study will be helped by asking various questions as the Bible is read: What part is history and what prophecy? What part is visionary and what real? What is figurative and what literal? What statements are conditional and what absolute? What parts have been fulfilled since the prophecy was written, either sooner or later, and what still remain unfulfilled? What belongs to the Northern Kingdom of Israel and what to the Southern? What is for Israel and what is for the world at large?

Passing from books to subjects, there are certain chapters which may be regarded as keys to prophecy, either because they present a prophetic scheme in outline, or because they call special attention to subjects of special interest. The following are examples:

Genesis 12	The outline promises made to Abraham and his seed.
Genesis 17	Covenant confirmed with Abraham.
Genesis 49	The blessing of the tribes.
Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28	The promises and threats set before the people when they were about to enter Canaan.
Deuteronomy 32	The prophetic song which gives the scheme of Israel's fall and rising again through all time.

Isaiah 11 (tied in with Rom.11)	Christ coming to rule.
Isaiah 13, 14	The fall of Babylon and the restoration of Israel.
Isaiah 24-27	The restitution of all things.
Isaiah 53	The Sin-bearer.
Jeremiah 30, 31	The return of Israel and the making of a New Covenant.
Jeremiah 50, 51	The punishment of Babylon.
Ezekiel 38, 39	The role of Russia and the Asiatics in the latter days.
Daniel 2, 7	The rise and fall of empires.
Daniel 9	The Seventy weeks prophecy leading to Christ.
Daniel 11	Overall prophecy from Alexander the Great to endtime.
Daniel 12	The endtime.
Hosea 7	Sin and punishment of Ephraim (Britain).
Micah 4	Millennium ushered in.
Zechariah 12-14	The downfall of those who attack Jerusalem.
Malachi 4	The fate of the wicked.
Matthew 24, 25	Christ's prophecy concerning the endtime and His second coming.
Romans 9-11	The prospects for Israel and Gentiles.
Revelation 6 (tied in with Mat.24)	Events preceding Christ's return.
Revelation 11	Return of Christ.
Revelation 12	History and future of true Church.
Revelation 13, 17	History and future of false Church.
Revelation 20-22	Closing scenes in the world's history.

Arrangement of Prophecies

Knowing the proper arrangement of the prophecies gives a greater understanding of them. Fraser says:

The obscurity of the prophecies arises partly from the language in which they are conveyed, but chiefly from the manner in which they are arranged. The labours of the learned have already thrown so

much light on the language of prophecy, that it can be no longer unintelligible to the attentive reader. . . . The arrangement of the prophecies is not so easy a matter; to bring together the several passages which refer to the same event, so as to view it by their united light (Alexander Fraser, A Key to the Prophecies, pp. 7-8).

The prophets wrote about four main subjects:

(1) the nation of Israel, (2) Christ as the promised Messiah, (3) the Gentile nations who come in contact with Israel and (4) the endtime and the establishment of God's government during the Millennium. As Angus says, "The great end and theme of prophecy is CHRIST; either in His person and office, or in the establishment of His kingdom (Joseph Angus, The Bible Handbook, p. 246).

The Millennium

The Millennium is a period which the prophets speak about frequently and give many descriptions. When we see that the prophet is referring to the Millennium, it is a key to open up the meaning of the other events connected with it in the same section of prophecy. From their relation to the Millennium, we can know the general order of events in other prophecies.

Base all prophecies in the Old Testament on the summary outline given by Christ in Matthew 24 and the Book of Revelation. The overall outline of prophecy begins with Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28-30. Daniel 2, 4,

7-12 bridge the gap between the Captivity of Israel to our day now. Daniel 2 and 7 with Revelation 17 and 18 fill in endtime details. Revelation 12 and 13 give others. Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21 are major prophecies tying in with Revelation 4, 5, 6. This brings a tie in with Revelation 11, 20, 21.

Interpretation of Prophecy

The interpretation of prophecy is important and is governed by certain principles which need to be applied conscientiously if difficulties are to be overcome and errors avoided or corrected.

Here are seven important principles:

(1) Truth about Israel. Approximately one third of all the Bible is devoted to prophecy--and about 90 per cent of all that prophecy still pertains to our day, right now. Many whole books of Scripture, especially in the Old Testament--Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and all the so-called "minor" prophets--are devoted exclusively to prophecy.

The prophecies of the Bible have been grievously misunderstood because a vital key, needed to unlock prophetic doors to understanding, had become lost. That key is a definite knowledge of the true identity of the American and British peoples in biblical prophecy. It is the understanding of the fact that the twelve tribes of

Israel were divided into two nations called the House or Kingdom of Judah and the House or Kingdom of (ten-tribed) Israel.

Prophecies cannot be understood without this key. And since seven-eighths of the entire Bible refer to the literal, social and historical affairs of Israel and Judah, not to understand the distinction between the House of Israel and House of Judah is to misunderstand seven-eighths of the Bible. The very understanding of the differences between the two houses of Israel is the key by which almost the entire Bible becomes intelligible.

This key is fully explained in Mr. Armstrong's book, The United States and British Commonwealth in Prophecy.

(2) Chronology. Prophecies are very seldom written in chronological order. Some events are grouped together, but are in actual fact widely separated in time order. The actual frame-work, or super-structure of all the prophecies is found in two prophetic books--Daniel and Revelation. And in the Book of Revelation alone do we find events of the various other prophecies co-related in order of time sequence. It is an index giving the general order of events and their relation to each other. This book is written with a story-flow, relating one future event to another in time order--with occasional

insets injected into the continuous story-thread. This is a vital key to understanding a large portion of the other prophecies. See Mr. Armstrong's booklet, Book of Revelation Unveiled at Last, for more details.

But God's Plan--His chronological time table--cannot be understood without knowing the meaning of the Holydays. The Holydays mentioned in the twenty-third chapter of Leviticus picture God's Plan for bringing about His purpose. They picture the different epochs in the Plan of spiritual creation. They mark the dispensations and picture their meaning. Mr. Armstrong's booklet, Pagan Holidays--or God's Holydays--Which? explains the meaning of these Holydays.

(3) Duality in Prophecy. A duality runs through every phase of God's Plan. There was the physical creation and there is a spiritual one still in process. There was the first Adam--material and earthy. And there is the second Adam--Jesus Christ who was spiritual and from heaven. There was the Old Covenant with material promises and the New Covenant with spiritual aspects.

This same dual principle also runs through prophecy. First, there is a former or preliminary fulfillment which is merely a type or forerunner of a second and final climactic fulfillment which is to occur during this crisis at the close (Isa. 41:22 and Eccles. 1:9; 3:15).

The events mentioned in the prophecies may have already been fulfilled as a type sometime in the past. But the major fulfillment will take place in this twentieth century--in the next few years. This duality is a master key which unlocks dozens of prophecies. Many prophecies cannot be understood without applying this vital key.

(4) New Testament Prophecies. Prophecies which concern the Church must never be confused with those referring to Israel as a nation and the future Kingdom of Israel. This especially applies to the prophecies in the New Testament.

(5) Bible Interpretation of Symbols. Prophecy must be first understood as having a literal meaning. It is not always symbolical or figurative. It must be taken literally unless the context or scriptures elsewhere makes it clear that symbolical or figurative language is being used.

It is true, of course, that prophecy is often expressed in figurative language. But in all such instances, however, the natural and obvious meaning will be found within the context of the passage itself.

Symbols are also often used in prophecy. The book of Revelation especially is filled with symbols. A symbol is something which stands for something else. These symbols are not always shown clearly as to what they

represent. God uses symbols to hide the meaning until His time should come for the meaning to be revealed. The Bible is written with "another tongue" (Isa. 28:10-11)--a tongue which uses unknown SYMBOLS. But the Bible always interprets its own symbols. God has to tell us what they mean as only He knows what they represent. God tells us the meaning in plain language in another part of the Bible, if not in the context itself. He uses the same symbolical word and explains clearly what it means there.

Therefore, if we don't understand the meaning of a symbolical word, we must look it up in a concordance. We must search for God's own interpretation and never apply our own. As an example, if you want to know what the "great red dragon" in Revelation 12:3 represents, locate the word "dragon" in the concordance. You will find that the word "dragon" also appears in Revelation 12:9 where it says the "great dragon" is called the Devil. Therefore, the "dragon" of verse 3 is the Devil.

(6) Context and Parallel Passages. Prophecy, like all other parts of Scripture, must be read in the light of its proper context. The total scheme of prophecy must also be considered. Isolated passages must be studied in relation to other prophecies on the same subject and in the same setting.

Several passages of the Old Testament prophecies

are quoted and explained in the New Testament. Every passage of this kind is a key to open up the whole section of prophecy connected with it.

Since no prophecy is of private (capricious) interpretation (II Pet. 1:20-21), each prediction must be compared with others on the same topic and with history-- both secular and Biblical. "Parallel predictions will often throw light upon one another, and recorded fulfillments will explain predictions or parts of predictions still unfulfilled" (Joseph Angus, The Bible Hand-book, p. 246).

(7) Language of the Prophets. Girdlestone has well said:

That which makes the language of prophecy so vivid and yet so difficult is that it is always more or less figurative. It is poetry rather than prose. It abounds in peculiar words and expressions which are not usually to be found in prose writings of the same date. It is rich with allusions to contemporary life and to past history, some of which are decidedly obscure. . . . The course of individuals, the rise and fall of nations, the prospects of the world at large, are all rapidly portrayed in realistic language. As we read we ask ourselves whether the figures which thus pass over the page in such quick succession are to be interpreted literally or ideally (R. B. Girdlestone, The Grammar of Prophecy, p. 48).

The prophets often speak of the remote future as if it were the present from their point of view (Rom. 4:17). They also sometimes speak of the future as having already happened in the past or use terms for the future that have been borrowed from the past. And when the

precise time of individual events was not revealed, the prophets described them as being continuous.

They used certain prophetic expressions which have special meaning. The prophet Isaiah frequently uses the expression, "in that day." Whenever he says this, he means the "day of the Lord"--the latter days just before Christ returns (Isa. 2:2, 11-12). "Ye shall know that I am the Lord" is a favorite expression used by Ezekiel.

The prophets will give several parallel views of the same period of time. They run over the same events, yet enlarge in one view on events slightly touched in another.

At other times, the prophets briefly relate events, and afterwards enlarge on the whole or part of the period to which they are referred. Or sometimes they narrate the series of events briefly, and enlarge only on the concluding events. According to Fraser:

The prophets sometimes stop short in describing the progress of events, and introduce matter which, at first view, appears foreign to the subject. Upon investigation, it will be found that they pause to answer objections which naturally occur from their subject, and are tacitly understood, though not expressed. . . .

At other times the prophets interrupt the detail of events, in order to make a practical application of some important fact foretold; showing the influence it ought to have on those who hear it, but especially on those who see it accomplished, according to their several situations (Alexander Fraser, A Key to the Prophecies, p. 26, 28).

The prophets will also rapidly pass from one event

to another. Two events mentioned close together may be thousands of years apart in their fulfillment.

Enemies of the Church are described by the prophets as being the same as the former persecutors of Israel. The term Babylon is used to signify Rome which is also described as being Sodom and Egypt.

Biblical prophecy can be understood. Daniel said the "wise shall understand" them (Dan. 12:9-10). The way to get wisdom--to come to understand the Bible prophecies--is to first fear and obey Almighty God (Prov. 1:7; 2:6; 9:10). Next, one must learn to respect, to fear, to tremble before the divinely-inspired Word of God--to fear to misapply, to misinterpret, wrest, distort and twist the sacred Word of God (Isa. 66:1-2). Girdlestone put it aptly when he said:

In a word, watchful care and accuracy in dealing with words, fidelity to the text, thorough study of the historical books which set forth God in Providence, an honest determination to be led by the Spirit of Truth and not by a foregone theory--these are the requirements of the man who would deal thoroughly and loyally with the prophetic Scriptures (R. A. Girdlestone, The Grammar of Prophecy, p. 105).

It is only when one has truly come to fear God, to obey God, has repented and received God's Holy Spirit, that true understanding of the prophecies of God can be comprehended (I Cor. 2:14).

CHAPTER IX

DIFFICULTIES IN DOCTRINE

We have already seen many rules and principles for solving Bible difficulties in this thesis. If these rules are followed when studying doctrine, little difficulty should be encountered. But a few additional guidelines can be given that will prove helpful.

A doctrine is what the Bible teaches about a particular subject. The apostle Paul said that all scripture is profitable for doctrine and instruction in righteousness (II Tim. 3:16). If doctrine is found in all of the Scriptures, then we must study all the Scriptures to find the complete and accurate Bible teaching about any particular doctrine. Angus affirms this:

To gather doctrinal truth from Scripture, we bring together all the passages that refer to the same subject, whether they be doctrines, precepts, promises, or examples; impartially compare them; restrict the expressions of one passage by those of another; and explain the whole consistently. (Joseph Angus, The Bible Hand-book, pp. 359-360.)

This is exactly what the prophet Isaiah said to do:

Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts. For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little. (Isa. 28:9-10, emphasis mine.)

The key to many doctrines will be found in the New Testament. Christ, through His example and teachings, came to expound the laws given to ancient Israel. It is through His teachings and the instructions of the apostles that we can know God's will and purpose, His plan of salvation, the way we ought to live to conform to God's laws. It is from Christ that we can know God because He came to reveal the Father (John 14:7-11).

But some parts of the New Testament cannot be understood without knowing the Old Testament. A full knowledge of both the Old and New Testaments, compared to each other, is needed to correctly understand any doctrine.

Once we have gathered together all the passages on any one particular subject or doctrine, we can then determine what is the correct Bible teaching. Taking some scriptures and ignoring others will often result in a wrong conclusion and a false doctrine.

Study Plain Scriptures First

When studying doctrine, an important rule is: Begin with the plainer scriptures and reserve the more obscure ones until you have more knowledge. Base all doctrine on direct statements of scripture. Doctrine should never be based on obscure scriptures instead of the plain

and clear ones. The student needs to realize that some scriptures, if taken by themselves and out of context, can be made to say more than one thing. This is why it is important to study all the scriptures on any one subject to get at the truth. In such a study, begin with the plain and clear scriptures first.

When studying the subject of the law and Ten Commandments, here are the clear and plain scriptures to keep in mind: I John 2:4; 3:4; 5:2-3; Mat. 5:17; 19:17. These scriptures cannot be twisted to say that God's Law and His Commandments are abolished and no longer need to be obeyed.

If heaven and hell is the subject, begin with such scriptures as John 3:13 and Acts 2:34 before trying to understand John 14:2 and Luke 16. About the soul, Genesis 2:7, Psalm 146:4 and Ecclesiastes 9:5 are clear and plain. Matthew 10:28, on the other hand, is vague and obscure. Any such scripture must be understood in the light of the plainer ones. Angus gives this rule:

Where the doctrine of Scripture is important and necessary, the Scripture will be found full and clear. Where Scripture is not full and clear, the doctrine is either in itself not important, or the certain knowledge of it is unattainable in our present state. (Joseph Angus, The Bible Hand-book, p. 364.)

Doctrine should not be based solely on a parable. The parables were not always written in clear and plain

language. They were written to hide the true meaning of Christ's teaching (Mat. 13:13-15). Because of their vagueness, parables lend themselves to fanciful interpretations. McClelland shows what meaning some Bible scholars give to a simple parable:

What can be more simple and intelligible than the parable of the good Samaritan, which so beautifully inculcates universal benevolence! It is absolutely transparent! Yet in the hands of some it turns out a perfect riddle, where the true significance is not obscured, but utterly lost. The man who fell among thieves, is the sinner; the thieves, are the devil and his angels; the priest who passed by on the other side, is the law; the Levite, is legal obedience. The good Samaritan, is Christ; the oil, is grace; the wine, comfort from the promises; the inn-keeper, is the Christian Ministry; the coming again, is death, judgment, and eternity. All this may be very pious; but we repeat our maxim, that no piety can give respectability to want of plain common sense. (Alex. McClelland, Canon and Interpretation of the Holy Scriptures, p. 250.)

The parable of Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16) is used to support the false doctrine of eternal torment in hell fire. Those who believe in this doctrine have ignored the clear and plain scriptures on this subject and have read a meaning into this parable which is not there when we study the Bible as a whole. (See Mr. Armstrong's booklet, The Truth about Lazarus and the Rich Man.)

The Bible was not written in a clear-cut, right-down-the-line manner. In order for it to be preserved for us today, it had to be written in a way so people could interpret it to suit themselves, and so the atheists,

agnostics and critics could find fault with it and "stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto they were appointed" (I Peter 2:8).

Make no mistake about it. If the Bible is inspired by God, there can be no errors in it as originally written --because God could not make a mistake. The Bible plainly says, "The scripture CANNOT BE BROKEN" (John 10:35). The Bible CANNOT CONTRADICT ITSELF! There can be no real discrepancies. Collett affirms this fact by saying:

It should never be forgotten that in spite of what critics have said, no error or contradiction of any kind has ever been proved to have existed in the Scriptures as originally given by God! (Sidney Collett, Scripture of Truth, p. 81.)

And another Bible scholar came to the strong conviction that, "every difficulty and discrepancy in the scriptures is, and will yet be seen to be, capable of a fair and reasonable solution" (John W. Haley, Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible, p. x).

The more we study the Bible, the more questions will be answered. As our knowledge increases, more and more difficulties will disappear. God intends that we understand all the Bible.

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