

831200 How the Bible was Preserved HLH

I would like to extend greetings to the ministers here from the Imperial Congregation, where my wife and I attended this morning, as our usual assignment is.

I have heard many a time, of course, of those who were last, but not least.

I have never heard the definition of the least.

But I must ask Mr. Takatch, sometime, as which he thought were the least.

I want to tell you the ones I thought were the greatest.

It was an unusual experience, and I suppose as a lecture in the refreshing program, as any lecturer will have, there are certain sessions.

The group that was here in January, to me, was the high point, partly because it was bilingual.

And we had the finest response from our Spanish-speaking ministry, and I really enjoyed, of course, working with the translator.

It was the only session, I believe, where all the English-speaking ministers were able to take notes during the time Spanish was spoken.

Anyway, the Spanish ministry did seriously ask me to see if we could visit some portions of Latin America for the Feast of Tabernacles this year.

I have never been, other than when a student in college to Ensenada, California, I have never been in Latin America south of the border beyond Tijuana.

It's one of the areas of the world that I have simply relied on others for information.

I've been to Afghanistan, I've been to Southwest African Namibia where not everybody has a chance to go, but I've never been to this part of the world, and I felt at the time had come with a responsibility and editorial work not to ever have seen it, even though we have this critical area in Central America, I felt for sure demanded a chance this year and not any later to visit it.

So I will be able to go with my wife if all things work out.

Our daughter-in-law and son and one grandson are going to go.

Our daughter-in-law, of course, was born in Costa Rica, and our grandson speaks Spanish better than he speaks English circumstantially.

He also listens to German once in a while, so he has a better stock in many who even wrestle with English through life.

But that's just a word of advice to all of you.

After that, I wanted to mention that I have been asked graciously to visit Syria again.

I did the following our editorial meeting in Great Britain where I had the chance to meet the staff there.

I was very happy to hear Mr. Jewell this afternoon.

I took a quick trip to visit the excavation in which AICF, the Ambassador Foundation, has had an ongoing interest for a number of years as a result of our friends who had been involved with the Institute of Archaeology at UCLA, and I hadn't been at the excavation since 1978, so I felt it was proper in 1983 to go there, and happily I was there for the last three days.

I had a chance after that period of time to do something I had never done before, and that is we took a trip with three Italians.

Actually the excavation is under the direction of a man who teaches in the United States but is an Italian citizen having been born in Milan and retains his citizenship.

And we did something that I have often wished I could do, and that is to cross by automobile central Mesopotamia to the Turkish border.

Most of us have seen on a map what it looks like, but I used to wonder why do people live in this area? I've been in Louisiana and New Orleans and still ask the question, but I often wondered what it was like to live in the central and northern plains of Mesopotamia.

I can understand why one wouldn't live in many areas in the south where we have nothing but blowing sand and where we have date palms along the rivers, and in a sense nothing grows unless there is a little pool of water.

But how was it possible to live in northern Mesopotamia or central Mesopotamia, especially in the Syrian area? And so we had a chance from the provincial capital on the Euphrates to take an auto-trip to the Habur River, there's just a slight diversion to get there, and then to follow the Habur River all the way to the inside of the Turkish border.

And I was just mentioning this to our student who's from Lebanon, and I mentioned that we had traveled all the way to Kamishliya, which was the northern most city in this area, and I had not realized before that that's where her family came from.

It is, as she said, a very old town.

I thought it was a very normal town, but that's the way much of Syria is.

If you've ever been in eastern Colorado or western Kansas, where you have the winter snows or rains, you may have it dry in certain parts of the year, but at least there is enough rainfall to bring the grain up.

I found that to be the case in this part of the world, and it is a beautiful area, and I want to say for any of you who've never had a chance to be there, this is not a part of the Promised Land, this is on the other side of the Promised Land.

The Promised Land goes to the Euphrates River, but this is on the other side, and it is a marvelous grain land throughout the countryside.

You can see the cut grain in the month of June, and there is a great quantity of water that flows in these rivers from the mountains of Turkey.

It's a very pleasant area, a very conservative region, and one that is just now opening up because, as many of you may never have realized before, and I did not either, that this part of Syria has for the first time been found to contain oil.

Up to this point, there has been no known oil in the Republic of Syria, but there is in the northeast, and so the region is being opened up.

I had a chance also, before reaching the Euphrates River, after leaving Damascus, to do something that I did not before, previously one had to fly across the country because the only roads were essentially going west to east, but now for the first time the roads are open from south to north, which seems very strange.

You would think that in the cradle of civilization everything would have been very modern, but it was in 1978 that they were beginning to introduce electricity to the little town where our excavations occur, which was once the capital of an ancient kingdom in the period of time when the patriarchs were living.

But it's an area in which civilization, in a sense, has existed for a long time, but the industrial revolution simply bypassed.

It is, in a sense, a privilege to be able to go back again.

I would like to say that the President of Syria, Mr. Assad, has extended a personal invitation to all of the institutions, and this necessarily is extended to AICF and to the institute with which we work in this case, the Institute for Mesopotamian Area Studies, to be there at the 50th anniversary of the excavations at Mari, which were begun by the French in 1933.

And this is a great honor to Syria.

Many Italians will be there, those Italians whom we assisted, in part, in touring this country in Canada, Professors Archi, Professors Mathieu, who are involved in the excavations of Ebla, they will also be there.

And Mr. McNair, who is our Deputy Chancellor, was, of course, aware of the fact and present on the occasion when they called upon Mr. Armstrong at the end of their visit to this country.

It will be an opportunity, of course, to have a chance to meet other individuals, but it illustrates to what extent, even if there is a crisis involving Syria and disagreement between Syria and the United States, there is no question that the general attitude of Syria is that of respect for the people of this country.

You would never hear anti-American slogans cited or written on walls over there.

There will be questions with respect to our policy and the State of Israel.

But as a whole, I think I could say that the attitude of the Embassy in Washington, D.C., is reflected in the fact that if any of us have asked to go to Syria, they have granted us visas without cost, though it normally would cost \$15.

I think that's the figure.

I, in fact, sent a check to them because I should pay for the visa I felt, and they sent it back.

I thought that does say something of the attitude of this part of the Islamic world.

And I can also tell you a little story.

Some of you have heard it before.

This goes back to my first visit in 1978.

I ended up in Damascus after visiting the excavations there and leaving a certain sum of money.

I simply didn't have quite enough to stay in a hotel if I used cash, and I went to the hotel near the airport, and I said I have a credit card or I have a check, but I have only so much cash.

Well, they don't take credit cards, and they don't take checks.

I said, well, then I will go to the airport.

No, the man behind the counter said, you stay here, and I will pay your bill.

And when you get back to the United States, you mail me the money for the bill.

I had to think to myself, what if this had happened in New York? Here I was not only leaving Damascus, I was leaving Syria, and as far as he knew I was leaving for good.

But it tells you something of the ability of those people to size up another and to know what is the honorable thing to do.

I do appreciate meeting people like this in the world, and in a sense it also reflects somewhat on the country as a whole, because it's that kind of attitude that I met when I came back from the northern Turkish border this time.

I had to come back alone.

The Italian contingent of three remained there to make arrangements with the government for further excavations, and I was having to take buses and change buses.

And I do not know Arabic.

There, you would have thought they might have learned French, but the French ruled the country so long ago that a whole new generation has grown up that simply knows neither French nor English to any extent at the lower levels that we would call bus drivers and those who ride on the buses.

And so what happened is that our Italian friends told the bus driver that I needed to go to a certain point, and there I would change the bus and go further, and to tell the second bus driver that when I arrived at my destination, he should take me to where I ought to go.

Now, I didn't hear the conversation, but this is what did happen.

They put me on, I was on the first bus, the driver of the first bus talked to the driver of the second and explained the story, and I was given a chance to choose the seat on that bus, and when we got to the end of the line on the Euphrates River, he told me to stay on the bus, and after everybody else got off, he simply drove the bus right to the place where I was going to be in the hotel as a personal courtesy without a tip.

Now they do take tips in that country, but I knew in this sense you don't pay a man who does this.

He did that as something very special, and I accepted it as a special courtesy, and I believed that that was the way it was to be understood.

I wish that many nations of the world had the same kind of response, but in any case, I will be happy to convey your best wishes in advance of that trip to Syria that is coming up to the brethren in Costa Rica and in Guatemala with whom my wife and I will be meeting during the Feast of Tabernacles.

There will be no festive occasion before the brethren held in the country of El Salvador because of the critical situation, but the brethren there will be meeting as far as I know in Guatemala.

I hope you do keep aware of the events at this moment in Guatemala.

The rest of it, of course, is important because there has been a change of government there, and the man who is in charge right now is the man who whitewashed the death of one of our members and three friends who are not church members but friends of the institution.

While we have a little time this afternoon, since this is a session in which some of the ministers are here, I thought I would deal with an appropriate topic in a reasonably short period of time that we have left that would be of help throughout the church wherever they go and of some significant value to all of you before we reach 1984.

The reason for that I will make known in a moment, but before I do, I would like to ask if after the services today I could meet with Mr. and Mrs. Roger Ludwig of Meeker, Colorado, here back of the stage.

He's one of and his wife are visiting at the present time on the refreshing program.

President Reagan has, as a result of course of congressional approval, declared this to be the year of the Bible, and we have asked when we were in England in June that Robert Boraker should address this question.

He seems to be the kind of person who could most appropriately do so, and so we want to take a look in the plain truth at this book that we call the Bible and its role for our general readership, especially those on the newsstand who are aware of the book but do not generally understand what it really means, and of course the religious community should know something more than it does in general.

But I would like to give us something of the background of this book that we call the Bible because it is not going to be too far down the stream of time when we will be dealing with the question of authority when it comes to the matter of a church that is going to be linked to a great state or empire where the question has always been, who is in authority? Are we dealing with the Bible as a book to which we appeal, or do we appeal to a man in a high religious office, a successor of Peter? You should realize that we are coming to the place, as you heard in the story of Northern Ireland, where there will be a question as to the legitimacy of the possession of this book that we call the Bible.

Nobody questions our right to have one today, but as they called it in question in times past and as there was a tribulation in the Middle Ages and before, so also in our generation if there is going to be a religious persecution of which Jesus clearly spoke, then we should also expect that the possession of a Bible that is not official or a Bible at all may well be called in question.

I think it is important, therefore, that we have some understanding of this book that the Catholic Church claims is a Catholic book, or that the Jews might claim in part is their religious and cultural heritage.

How did we get this book? And in a sense, what is the nature of the text of this book as far as God being able to preserve it through the centuries? You and I should know that the Worldwide Church of God, previously the Radio Church of God did not preserve this book that we call the Bible.

We received it as a result of the environment around us.

It has been published by the British Societies, the American Bible Societies, by various other publications, Thomas Nelson.

It has never been a responsibility of this church to transcribe the Bible in its original Greek or Hebrew for you.

We tell you to go and buy one and to read in it and to check up to be sure that you compare your life to what is in there.

So somewhere along the time, we have to realize that God's church was not itself the custodian of the text of the Bible, but was instead a group of people who announced the message in the Bible.

Or this is to say, in other words, that the Bible was never the singular and unique possession of God's church, called the Church of God, since the days of the Apostles.

It is, in fact, a work that is a witness to the world culturally, religiously, that has preserved this book.

You and I know that parts of the world have not preserved this book.

It is not preserved in the Islamic world, in the world of Asia.

It was, in the end, preserved in the civilized Roman and European world, and wherever that world has spread to in the South Pacific or Africa or throughout the New World.

There was a time, of course, when there was no written revelation, but God spoke to the patriarchs personally, sometimes in a dream, sometimes in a vision.

The written record that we are familiar with, which we call Holy Scripture, did not take its rise before the time of the Exodus.

This does not mean, of course, that Abraham was not aware of God.

He most certainly was.

God talked to him, visited him, meaning the one who we know is Jesus Christ.

He was known to Noah.

He was known to Abel.

He was known to Enoch.

Cain knew him, too, and did not do his will.

We have the family of Ishmael, the family of Esau, and then the family of Jacob.

All of these, in one way or another, had contact with the God, who later chose to reveal his will, not by personally coming regularly to everybody, but to having it written down.

So with the days of Moses, following the Exodus, out of Egypt, and in the Sinai Peninsula, we begin the story of the written record that we call the Bible.

The Hebrew Scriptures, that we call the Old Testament today, represent an interesting story for the moment.

In the first place, you have to realize that God chose the family of Isaac, not Ishmael.

He chose the family of Jacob and not Esau in the two accounts as those generations go by.

And of the children of Jacob, there were certain things said, one, that a scepter or responsibility with respect to government would pass ultimately to Judah.

And a birthright was finally transferred from one firstborn Reuben to another, Joseph.

Now bearing that in mind, we'll just pick up the story again.

God gives to ten, I should say, twelve tribes, technically we might even say there were thirteen, but we'll count Joseph as one and speak of the twelve tribes of Israel.

He began to give them the revelation of his law, then the written account that we have in Genesis and Exodus, a year later the material in Leviticus, then we have the story of the wanderings in the book of Numbers, the repetition of the giving of the law east of Jordan in the book of Deuteronomy.

So that by the time the children of Israel were ready to cross westward, not only do we have the law written in the five books, we certainly have the account of Job.

We have one or more scrolls, and the children of Israel are in possession of a written literature.

When they crossed over Jordan as the children of Israel settled down, God chose judges, and from time to time when a judge died and the nation departed quickly, God didn't choose any leader until the people came back to their senses as a result of the trouble at the hands of the Gentiles.

So what is significant at this point is to realize that the nation as a whole was the custodian of this book.

No other nation had access to these records.

No other nation had access.

Just one nation in the region we later call Palestine, but in that time was called Canaan or the Promised Land.

But most of the people didn't read.

There was no institution called the public school, and the bulk of the people very clearly were not able to read during that period.

There were professional people who read and wrote.

We call them generally scribes, and the material was normally read to them.

We have to realize this very important fact, so they appealed to the teachers of the law.

Now in the meantime, you will discover, of course, that during the Sinai excursion, the children of Israel were assigned a specific tribe, Levi, to teach and to be the priesthood.

The family of Aaron within the tribe of Levi functioned as the priesthood, and the rest of the Levites assisted it.

So we have now, in a sense, a nation which God governs through the judges as they're in Palestine, but the function of a single tribe is to be able to teach throughout the land this law, and so we may presume if you're going to teach the law, you're going to read the law first.

Naturally, you can hear it orally and memorize and repeat it.

But undoubtedly the most learned of the tribes, if you please, the one tribe that did not have to spend time earning a living outside of this work was the tribe of Levi, the one tribe that could have spent the majority of its time not having to be concerned with earning a living directly, but having to do God's will at the altar and to be able to teach and judge, and in turn God paid them from the tithe that he collected from the other tribes of Israel.

So they were among the most learned of the tribes without any question.

The people heard the word of God, but there were no great prophets at that day.

We call them seers, that is they had visions and dreams and spoke to the judges.

There was one added book in that generation at the beginning of it anyway, and that's the book of Joshua.

The account of the whole story of the next four centuries approximately is summarized in the days of Samuel, and we have that in the book of Judges.

Now Samuel was not a seer, Samuel was a prophet.

For the first time, God was now using a man not only to see visions or dreams and to speak to a judge, but in fact to be the spokesman of God to the nation, hence he's called a prophet, and he is speaking to the nation.

And from this time on we have a very important role of the family of Levite.

Samuel was a Levite reared in the region of the tribe of Ephraim.

There were a great many other people whom God called over the years, over the centuries, and the greatest names where we may identify their tribal ancestry interestingly turn up to be of the house of Levite when it came to the role of the prophet.

Samuel and Jeremiah and Ezekiel were all of the family of Levite and contributed major portions.

There's little doubt that many of the others where we do not have direct access to the background were also of the tribe of Levite.

But not all, Daniel was of the tribe of Judah, of the house, the royal house.

In any case, the understanding of the Bible, the teaching to the people of the words of this book was the fundamental responsibility of the family of Levite and of the priests.

There came a time, however, after Saul that God chose someone of the house of David.

Now what is interesting here is that David was the first person who sat on the throne from the time that God made a commitment that Judah would, that because Judah prevailed above his brother and the scepter would come from Judah, yet there was not a single ruler of the house of Judah who sat on any throne from the days of the patriarchs through the days of the children of Israel in Egypt, through the wilderness wanderings or through the period of judges, not even until at the death of Saul do we have someone of the house of David coming up.

And now we have something very important.

We have the role of the king in teaching and putting authority behind the scripture so that it could be made known and published, and the government itself in ancient Israel from David's time on was

used from time to time to restore whenever the nation or the people went astray, to restore God's truth.

When David spoke and wrote the Psalms, when others in his day made contributions, when Solomon in his day made such contributions as the Song of Songs, the various proverbs, ecclesiasties, we have new books being added to the Old Testament, but what is significant that I want to draw to your attention is that when Solomon is dead, the nation is divided.

The congregation of Israel, the people who had this book became two nations.

God said, let's not have a civil war.

They started to have one.

He said, let's not have one.

He said, this is of me.

I'm separating ten tribes from two.

The Levites went with as a whole the two.

So in a sense it was a ten and three relationship in general.

But as far as those tribes inheriting the land, it was ten and two, Benjamin and Judah were linked together primarily, and Levi was with them.

Why did God separate those ten tribes? In the first place, the children of Israel were not in a good spiritual attitude after the death of Solomon, and they were in revolt against the very government that God had established over the nation.

And when a people is in that state of mind, they're not fit preservers of the book.

So a strange thing happened when you look at it.

Ten out of the twelve land-owning tribes disowned the book, disowned God, disowned His holy days, disowned the Sabbath, disowned their own identity.

And after God pleaded with them from generation to generation through prophets, most of whom were raised up in Judah but not all, they did not listen, they did not accept, and at no time did they ever change their attitude.

And so instead of twelve tribes preserving this book in their language, it was finally preserved only in one nation.

It was preserved in that kingdom that we call the Kingdom of Judah, and God expelled the northern tribes, divorced them, sent them away.

They did not take with them into captivity any of God's revelation, neither the Sabbath, nor the calendar, nor His book, nor His priesthood, nor even ultimately the knowledge of their identity except as there might have been individuals among them who knew the truth or who learned the truth as just individuals whenever there were Jews in areas where they lived.

And when we find these people ultimately, as we may trace their modern descendants through history, we find them identifying themselves as Gentiles, speaking other languages, none of them having the faintest idea that this is their relationship that I have just mentioned.

There was, however, an interesting change of pace in Judah.

When sometimes a king went wrong, the next king did what was right.

Maybe it was two or three generations in each direction, but in the house of David was something different than in any of the royal families in Israel.

Over and over again, in the days of Asa, not to mention Rehoboam before, in the days of Ibiza and Jehoshaphat, the nation sought more or less God's will.

They went astray for the period following the death of Jehoshaphat.

They came back to some extent in the days of Joach.

They went astray, and in the days of Uzziah, they came back and stuck with him through much of the time of Jotham.

They had a problem of great proportion in the days of Ahaz, but returned in the days of Hezekiah.

That is, there was a constant reform that is getting back to where they should have been, where they had stumbled, and now picking themselves up through God's help and beginning to do His will, at least as they understood the letter of the law.

They would begin to keep the holy days again.

After Hezekiah's day, they had the longest period of spiritual drought in the days of Manasseh and his son, and then they came back in the days of Josiah.

Then after that, there was no king who really brought them back, but you see, all the way along, there were remarkable kings who brought the nation back to its senses, and there were remarkable prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, the latter two of the House of Levi.

There was a very great affinity in this sense between the faithful in the House of Levi, the faithful of the House of David, and the two families out of all the families of Israel were the ones that God used primarily to preserve this book.

But when the House of David in charge of the throne and the government in the land did not do what was right, and God sent them into gentile hands in the days of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, what is interesting, of course, is that there is one prophet that was left with the remnant in Judah, and another major prophet that was with the people in Judah in captivity, and a third one, not of Levi, but of the House of Judah, the House of David, of the royal family, who was, in a sense, a prophet at the throne where Nebuchadnezzar was in Babylon itself, that is Daniel.

So there were three remarkable prophets at the same time when the nation was going into captivity, beginning, but certainly did as time went on when they realized that what they said was true.

Now when the children of Judah went into captivity, the Bible was now in two areas.

It was in Mesopotamia, and it was in the land of Canaan.

Back in the land of Canaan, there were other people who had gotten hold of the book, who had been brought in there by the Assyrians, and added to by the Babylonians, we will call them the Samaritans. But the Bible in their hands could not be relied on. The Bible that went with the Jews into captivity came to be the authoritative text of the Bible when the Jews came back. That is, the Jews did not say that the manuscripts that had been in Palestine that they left behind had any

authority, because God never used those Samaritan Babylonian and Gentiles to preserve that book. They corrupted it. But the Bible was, for a whole generation and more, preserved outside of the Holy Land with the people of Judah in the land of Babylonia.

When Ezra came back, this was not the beginning of the return, but later, he did recognize that the Samaritans had indeed tampered with copies of the Bible, and so they made an authoritative decision that the Bible in the old script, the old Hebrew, would not any longer be the standard script, but they would use the script of Babylonia because in Babylonia they had preserved the text. And so it was that we have today the Hebrew Bible, not in the script of the Samaritans who keep the ancient script, but we have the Hebrew Bible in the script of Babylon because in Babylon there were prophets. There were men like Ezekiel, there were men like Daniel, the three servants of Daniel. Daniel bridged that whole period of time.

Then we had men like Zerubbabel and others who came from there, Ezra who came from there, Nehemiah who came from there. They all came from the region of Babylon and Persia where the Bible was being preserved in the house of Judah. And they separated that body of manuscripts that they had preserved from any manuscripts that had been tampered with by the Samaritans in the land of Palestine or Canaan. And they made an authoritative decision that the text should be written in a script different from what Moses wrote it, different from how David read the Bible. In order to protect its text, that was preserved till the days of Jesus and taught by those of the house of Levi, the house of Aaron. The family of Aaron of course was just a branch of the house of Levi. So the book was preserved then in Palestine again.

When it came to the period of Herod and the Roman world, the Bible was now rather widely known, not just in Judah, but circulating in the Greek translation in the various libraries of the then Greek world. In fact, around 285 BC it had first been translated into Greek and it was filed in the library of Alexandria and other copies were in circulation. And so it came to be that this book that we call the Bible was no longer found and no one only among the Jews, but no one also by translation in the Greek world. The Jews were very concerned about the inadequacy of those translations, but nevertheless, the translations were there and the Greeks came to be interested in this book of the Jews. When Jesus Christ came, he came of the house of David. As it turned out, instead of welcoming him as anciently Judah, finally welcomed David and Solomon and Rhea Bohm and the others, they rejected him. They rejected him because he gave a message that they were not then prepared to receive. They had become so much a part of this world that they looked upon the government of Rome as administered through Herod as the legitimate government.

And they interpreted Jesus' statements about the kingdom of God as embarrassing them and threatening their role in society. Now we are down to that period where God has chosen the twelve apostles and many others in the New Testament church. And at that period of time, God speaks messages that had already in part been spoken by the prophets, but now were elaborated and clarified in a way that had never been before. The prophets foretold the good news of the kingdom of God, but now it was expounded in detail. The prophets had told what the millennium would be like. They had told about the restoration of the government, but they had never made it clear so that everybody in the nation could understand that God was going to have to have everyone in the nation born again. There are illusions to the fact that we're going to be like God in the Psalms, but in the days of John the Baptist and Jesus and the apostles, the one thing that the Jews were so puzzled by and troubled by was when Jesus said it was not enough that you should have Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as your ancestors. They argued with John the Baptist, the Jews did, that we have Abraham to our father, and that is enough to be a child of the kingdom. Jesus said there's coming a time when the Gentiles will sit down at the feet of the patriarchs and the children of the kingdom be cast out. By

that he meant those who were not born of God, born again. So Jesus brought that aspect of the message and the apostles announced it and made it clear that we have to be born of God. You start out by being begotten of him in this life by receiving his Holy Spirit, having repented and believing the gospel, believing that Christ is the Messiah, that he paid the penalty for sin, which is the transgression of God's law.

All of that was now made known. The Jews didn't like to hear that because, in a sense, that was opening the door to a potential problem. At first it merely opened the door to the realization that being born of the flesh of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was not enough. That was troublesome enough to realize you had to be born ultimately of God at the resurrection, born again.

But then it occurred to them when a rabbi named Paul was called to the Gentiles, that if the Jew had to be born again, there was nothing keeping a Gentile from being born again.

And that meant you had to share all of this, to share the birthright and the blessings and the revelation, and it no longer made the Jew singularly so that he thought of himself as absolutely unique. He was indeed unique in the sense that he was used, as the Jew was used to preserve this book in Hebrew. But now it was possible that God was calling others, Greeks, Arameans, Phoenicians, Egyptians, various groups as far east as Persia, as far west as Italy, further west as time went by, down into Ethiopia, eastward into India, and all of these people were being converted and called of God. Most of them, of course, hearing the scriptures explained in their own language by individuals who read the scripture in Hebrew, also read it in Greek.

The Jews came to the place where they did not accept this revelation that God began to write to the New Testament apostles. They did not accept what we would call the books of the New Testament. There were indeed a great many priests who were converted, as Acts chapter 6 verse 7 tells us, a great company of priests were converted.

This is why it was possible to have so many people in the land of Judea be loyal to the word of God, and still be able to live in the house of Judah, because the priests had a very important role in the nation. But there was no one on the house of David with the authority to require the acceptance of the Greek scriptures in this nation of Judah, because the government was in the hands of Herod and the Herodian family.

There was no one seated on the throne of David. There was no one who could do what Josiah did, what Hezekiah did, to turn the time back and to get to that point where they were willing to do what God said like their ancestors had done, or as we use the term today to get back on the tracks, but in that way that day they didn't have railroad tracks to get back on. They had to get back to the faith of the fathers, but there was no one in government that would set that kind of pattern. And finally, of course, their city was destroyed in AD 70. The church of God, meanwhile, the church that Jesus founded on the day of Pentecost, you can read in Acts chapter 2, was a church that was receiving this revelation that God was revealing through the apostles, and we have such written records as Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, later on assistance to the apostles, such as Luke, wrote the book of Acts as he did write Luke. There's no evidence in that sense that Luke was an apostle. If I left that impression in the first sentence there I gave it would be incorrect. For that matter, Mark is not regarded as one, but the apostles Matthew and John and their assistants, Mark and Luke, wrote, and then you have Paul writing many letters. You have Peter and John and Jude, and Jesus' brother who became an apostle, James writing a letter. The church of God was the recipient of this book, step by step, generation by generation, but it was in Greek.

Now, the church of God was not copying, as a whole, the Hebrew. The Hebrew was being preserved by the Jews. It describes the professional men responsible, as Jesus said, responsible for the preservation of that book. They had it in translation, or they had it in explanation, but now the New Testament was in Greek, and Greek was the language of the Roman Empire, the Roman world. It was a message also that was to go to everybody. So now for the first time it was possible, not only to have a book that we call the New Testament, that various books of it, in the church, but also circulated in the world, because certainly people heard Paul in the Greek world, and they might wonder what he is saying, what he is writing, and it came to be common to make available the text of the New Testament in Greek beyond the confines of the church of God, by the very nature that other people could read it. Whereas in ancient days, essentially, Hebrew was limited to the land of Canaan. And in the New Testament times, very few people could read Hebrew, and they had to read it in translation, but the Greek was the language of most every learned person. And in the Roman world, it was very common to have what we would call public schools. Many people were educated far beyond the level of education ever dreamed of until the Roman Empire came on the scene, because the concept of such public schools really doesn't go back beyond the days of Plato and Aristotle, the classical Greek world, just before the rise of Alexander the Great. And gradually, that kind of a school system spread.

And so it was possible to have many books of the New Testament, generally known in the world, the Greek world, of course, was the most likely to preserve these books of the New Testament, because gradually, as the Roman Empire went on over the centuries, Latin came to be the language of the West and Greek, the language of the East. It was in the days of Constantine, in the Council of Nicaea 325, when the various divisions of this world's Christianity that had arisen with the crisis that befell the church in AD 66 to 70. Because in AD 66 to 70, there were many who thought the end was near and at hand. And when they saw Jerusalem surrounded with armies, they were sure the time was coming. And by AD 70 in the end of summer, they were disappointed and thought the whole thing was a fraud. And many of them left. But yet they hung on to the name of Jesus, and they abandoned the good news of the kingdom of God. And they began to think that the kingdom of God was not something to come, but was the church. So they kept the name of Jesus some of them, of course, went back into the world. They changed the gospel so that it referred to the church as the kingdom, but they did have copies of the Bible. And gradually, a church rose that we ultimately know as the Catholic Church of God. And there were other sects that didn't have that name. And then there were those who remained faithful and loyal to the teachings of the apostle John as late as the end of the first century. The New Testament was being spread abroad by those who were God's own church, and by those who had taken the name of the church, but had cut themselves off from God. See, John speaks of those who say they know Christ, but don't keep his commandments. He's talking there of people who thought of themselves as Christian.

And if you say that you are a son of God, and a Christian, and you know Christ, and you know God, and you don't keep his commandments, that meant that you had the book you knew about the Bible, you made the claim, but you really weren't God's own people because you weren't doing God's will.

You had a book that told you the will, but you didn't do the will of God.

The next step, of course, is that this book came to be published widely in the Greek world because Christianity in the days of Constantine came to be an official religion of the Empire.

And so the book that we call the Bible came to be circulated in its New Testament form in Greek because the Empire itself thought of itself as Christian.

And it thought of this book as the revelation of God to the Christian world, in particular, to the Greek Christian world. Because the Greek world was the dominant part now, and the Empire had shifted from Rome to Constantinople as far as the big city of the Empire. Whereas in Jesus Day, the city was Rome, and there wasn't even a Constantinople at all. Now that is significant because when in 330 Constantine founded the city of Constantinople, he set in motion the division of the Christian world into two language groups, East, Greek, and West Latin, as it ultimately developed. When the Roman Catholics tell you they have preserved the Bible, they're really telling you they've only preserved the Latin Bible. Because that's what they were copying until the Reformation as a whole. The Western world was limited to the Latin Bible. Even God's people in Western Europe, when they had translations in the languages of Northern Italy and Southern France, did not take those translations from the Greek. They took it from the Latin because that's all they had access to. That was in the Middle Ages. It was only later when Constantinople in 1453 fell that the Greek Bible came to be circulating in Western Europe commonly because the Turks had now demolished the capital and the Greek scholarly world, the learned religious people of Greece sought mountain fastnesses in the Greek Isles and sought Western Europe as a haven.

And so it was, you see, that the Church of God was wandering in all these lands, not having scribes copying the Hebrew, not having scribes copying the Greek, but going to the Jews for the Old Testament and going to the Greeks in the East for the New Testament and being reduced to going to the Latin translations in Western Europe for the New Testament. And not until the middle of the 15th century was the Greek Bible widely known in Western Europe. And from that time on it has been circulated not only in Greek and not only printed in Greek and Hebrew and Latin, of course, but from that time on a great number of translations into English and German and French and Spanish and Portuguese and Italian and Dutch. Not to mention, of course, Welsh, because that was one of the major translations in earlier days. The Russian and finally the Bible has simply been available in an immense number of languages so that wherever God's people are, we no longer read the Bible in Greek, we no longer read the Bible in Hebrew with smatterings of Aramaic unless we happen to be born of Greek or Hebrew or Aramaic speaking parents. We read the Bible in the language of the land in which we now are. So you see, the Jew has gone from here to there and preserved for us the knowledge of the calendar. But the Jew has not preserved the whole of the Bible. The Jew has only preserved part of the Bible. The Greeks finally gave in the 15th century their manuscripts to the world, to the scholarly world at large, and the church has had access to the translations from that Greek New Testament in the beginning of the, well, the latter half of the 15th century and into the 16th century. You will notice, of course, that this was before Martin Luther. There were translations into numerous languages before the Protestant Reformation. The Protestant Reformation was not the cause. Luther and the Reformation did not begin until 1517. Constantinople fell in 1453, and the scriptures began to be circulated. And from that time on, though the Greeks have been the custodians of their language, part of the Bible, and the Jews of their part of the Bible, it is interesting that the people who have most widely circulated the scriptures in the largest number of languages are the descendants of one of the ancient tribes of Israel that long before had rejected God, his calendar, his Sabbath, his book. They were the birthright people, the children of Joseph, who ultimately came to speak to King's English.

And so when God gave them the birthright, and they did not do anything with it after the days of Solomon, and Ephraim rejected the truth in those days, God so worked it out that in our day, a people that does not know its identity but still has the birthright, would do his will by using that birthright to multiply his word in all these languages by letting them think they were Christians. They had come to believe in the religion of the Messiah of the Jews, and even though they don't do his

will, though they say they do because they say they know him but do not keep his commandments, that's your test, yet they have been used, interestingly, to make this book available.

So that our brethren, whether in the South Pacific where they read Tongan, whether we read it in the Dutch or German, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Norwegian, Swedish, Finnish, wherever this work is going, and for that matter Japanese, Chinese. The Bible is in all these languages, it's in Thai.

Sometimes it's only a part of the Bible, but essentially it is a birthright people who have given us the modern forms of this book, and it is indeed the President of one of those birthright nations, this land, who has said that this is the year of the Bible. And so at the close of this refreshing program too, I thought it would be important for us to consider, as some of our ministers go out in the field at this point in time, to consider that as this year draws to a close, the people whose responsibility it is to publish this book have called it the year of the Bible, and it is our responsibility not to publish it, but to announce what is in it worldwide.