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Is My Bible True?

Where did we get it?

PART I.—THE NEW TESTAMENT.

I.

INTRODUCTION.



ONCE said to a Christian lady, "Is the Bible really true?" Without a moment's hesitation she answered, "Of course it is true." But when I asked her how she would proceed to *prove* it to be true, she could not answer me. *Could you?*

If I were to ask you where the Bible came from, who wrote it, and when and where, you might not be able to tell me readily. And yet these questions can be answered by those who have had time to study the subjects which they raise.

There are thousands of people all over the world

who love the Bible as the best of all books. It is their daily companion and friend. They accept it as the inspired Word of God. They come to it for comfort when they are sad, for guidance when perplexed, and for instruction in those matters of the soul and God which they cannot obtain elsewhere. It has quickened them into new life, and been to them one of God's agents in kindling on the altar of their hearts those flames of immortal glory which reach beyond the bounds of time. It inspires many of them to deeds of love and sacrifice, which make the world richer and better. The poor among them read it, and learn to sing songs of joy and gladness in their poverty. The rich among them read it, and many of them discover that they are stewards for God, and that the gold and silver which they hold belong to Him. The tempted and the tried find it a source of new strength and hope.

THE MASSES LOVE THE BIBLE.

Among these people are many of the excellent of the earth. Thousands of them would suffer any loss rather than part with the Bible. In the first centuries of the Christian era many were cast into prison rather than give up their Scriptures to those who were engaged upon the impossible task of exterminating the Bible. Numbers of them suffered death itself rather than dishonor the Word of the living

God. Among the masses of the people to-day there are multitudes who have the same loyal love for the inspired Book, and if occasion demanded it, would endure death rather than dishonor it.

And yet many of them could not answer my questions. It is to help such as these that I write these pages. I want them to know that the Bible which we have is substantially the same as that possessed by our Lord and His Apostles and the Christians in the first century.

There is one thing of which we are all sure—*the Bible is here*. Wherever it came from, whoever made it—we possess it. True or false, good or bad, of men or of God, inspired or uninspired, it is among us.

Our fathers had it before us. *Their* copies of the Scriptures are in our possession, not a few of them marked and made precious with the tears they shed upon the pages, hallowed with the breath of their prayers. Their fathers had it, too. Where did they get it? In order to discover its truth, we will

TRACE IT BACK TO ITS SOURCE.

The River Thames flows through London. It bears on its bosom the ships of all nations, which carry the merchandise of the world. Below London it flows into the ocean, and puts the nation in touch with all parts of the globe. It is interesting to follow it backward, and see it as it flows through quiet

valleys, past ancient cities and many a mile of peaceful scenery. Londoners do not like their old river any the less when they discover that it has its source as a small stream among the distant hills, and grows to be the noble river it is as it passes London after many other rivers and streams have flowed into it. In like manner, we shall love our Bible no less, but more, when we know how it came into the world and grew to be the noble book it is.

I shall have to take you on journeys to different cities and distant lands. We shall have to visit many libraries, examine old books and parchments, consult ancient records, and peep into some churches venerable with age. We shall have to visit ancient monasteries, and sit beside some of the old monks who are now safe in the better land.

We want to know, as far as we can learn, how to answer the following questions:

I. Is the Bible really true?

II. Where did our Bible come from?

III. Is our Bible the same which the ancient Christians read daily?

IV. Were the contents of our New Testament in our hands, in the hands of the Apostles and their friends and followers before the first century had closed?

V.—Is the Old Testament which we peruse the same which our Lord had?

We shall deal first with the New Testament, and then with the Old, and then we shall trace the history of our English Bible. May the spirit of God who inspired the holy Apostles help us and guide us in the way of all truth!

II.

CHRIST BEFORE THE GOSPELS.



OUR Lord lived and taught and died before the Gospels we possess were written at all. After His ascension into heaven, almost a generation passed before the earliest Gospel was written. We do not know that He wrote a line, except with His finger on the floor of the Temple when the Pharisees brought a fallen woman into his presence.

He came down from heaven, published the good news of salvation, called and trained His disciples, breathed upon them the Holy Ghost, and went back to heaven without leaving behind Him any written Gospel at all. The legacy He left to the world was not an organized Church, nor a proud priesthood, nor a set of written documents, but the small band of disciples whom He had Himself prepared to carry on the work He came to start. In the fierce controversies of the present age it may help us to remember this. Christ lived and His salvation was proclaimed before any part of the New Testament was put into writing.

Men found rest and peace, and salvation in Jesus Christ, before there was a Christian Church, a Christian ministry, or Christian Scriptures. If the New Testament should suddenly be lost, and the organized Christian Church be destroyed, men would still find salvation; for the Spirit of God is in the world and moves upon the hearts of men and guides them into the way of peace.

THE APOSTLES', PREACHING.

On the day of Pentecost the disciples received their full equipment as witnesses for Jesus and preachers of the glad tidings of the Kingdom of God. Beginning at Jerusalem, they went forth to many lands to publish the good tidings of great joy which God had made known for all men. With their own lips, and not out of books, they told the story of their Lord's life; of His death; and His glorious resurrection and ascension into heaven. Out of their own experience and knowledge they spake the things concerning their Lord. They declared what they had seen, and heard and felt of the love of God.

Men believed the gospel which they heard. In many places they came together for worship and being of one heart and mind formed Christian churches for mutual help, long before the Gospels and Epistles were written.

What need had the disciples and their companions

of written documents at all? Had not they been the companions, the pupils, and friends of the Master? Three of them had seen His glory on the Mount of Transfiguration. Some were present when He called Lazarus from the grave. Many saw Him on the cross. Had they not also seen Him alive after His resurrection and witnessed His ascension to heaven?

THE APOSTLES LIVING WITNESSES.

The living witness was better than any written testimony. Writing could not describe the looks, the tenderness, the pathos, the sympathy, the patience, the mercy, the pity, and the deep love of our Lord, as could the witnesses which He Himself had chosen and fitted for this work.

But as time went on great changes came. The little company of the Apostles, the original witnesses, began to decrease. Some were killed, and others were growing old. So long as they remained, and could have access to the churches, all went well. But as Christianity spread, and the churches grew up far apart from each other, and the Apostolic band diminished, it was only natural that the converts should be anxious to have the precious words they had heard put into permanent form, so that they might hand them on to all who should follow them

A PERMANENT RECORD.

And the disciples themselves would be anxious to

have the story put into writing that it might endure. They came to know that the Gospel they had to preach was for all men of all time.

When the Holy Spirit led them to see this it naturally followed that they would desire the continuance of the story of their Master, which it had been the business of their life to tell.

These were, doubtless, the circumstances which led many, as Luke tells us, to take in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which were most surely believed among them, as those who were ministers of the Word, and eye-witnesses from the first, had declared them. Thus the Gospels sprang up.

THE WRITING OF THE EPISTLES.

Then, too, many of the churches which the Apostles had planted in different places called for special communications from their founders. Disturbances in some of the churches, unfaithfulness in others, the generosity of others, and the needs of many, caused the despatch of letters, all more or less embodying the teaching of Jesus, and containing statements concerning the mind and will of God, and filled with precepts and principles governing the duty of Christian men and women. All these writings were highly prized, and would doubtless be kept as treasures by the churches to which they were sent.

Though printing was then unknown, writing was common. It is quite likely that many copies of the Gospels were written at the request and at the expense of the various churches, while many of them would doubtless procure copies of the letters sent to the different churches. All these writings would be regarded as precious treasures by the various bodies which held them, and be deposited in safe keeping together with their copies of the Old Testament, and all considered and treated as sacred books. It is certain that at a very early period some churches had possessed themselves not only of copies of the Gospels, but also of most of the Apostolic Epistles.

It is the story of some of these precious documents that we have to tell, so that we may know from whence our New Testament came.

We shall have to go back step by step right to the fountain-head. We will begin by looking at three of the oldest Bibles in the world; then we will notice some of the ancient fathers of the church; then we will go back a generation and learn something of the Apostolic Fathers; and lastly, we will glance at some ancient versions of the Scriptures: we desire to see what they have to say to us as to our question—Where did our Bible come from?