

THE BIBLE'S HISTORY

Your Bible - Unsullied History

George Burnside

The human heart longs for certainty. Especially in these confused times, people feel the need of security; the need of a foundation that is sure and certain. God has supplied this need. "But my God shall supply all your need." Philippians 4:19.

There is only one book in all the world where the past, present and future are combined in one record the past in authentic, unsullied history, instruction for the present, and clear statements about the future even of the end of our age.

All these are found in the Bible and nowhere else in the world. Much has been written regarding the Bible's predictions about the future, and much more regarding its instruction for the present; but little has been written of its unerring, unimpeachable historicity.

It was the amazing accuracy of Bible history that converted Sir William Ramsay from the unbelief of modern liberalism to a powerful champion of the veracity of the Scriptures. He said he found it "fascinating beyond description."

Speaking on one occasion to the students of the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, Sir William told how he had planned his life otherwise. He had sought the pleasant life of learning which would lead to a professor's chair. His literary associates regarded the Bible as a book of myths. He was a "worshipper of Wellhausen," and confesses that he accepted without question the findings of the brilliant scholars, who claimed that the life of Christ as recorded in the New Testament and the Acts of the Apostles were forgeries of later times.

A Statement Changed His Life

He lost faith in God and interest in the Bible. He became interested in the study of archaeology, and planned a three-year expedition to Greek lands in connection with the Oxford University. His interest was in the study of the antiquities that related to the Greco-Roman days. This led to explorations among the ruins of ancient monuments, inscriptions and relics of art.

At this time he stated that the Book of Acts was regarded as probably the weakest link in the New Testament and that "no one that had any regard for his reputation as a scholar cared to say a word in its defense."

It was what appears to be a very unimportant statement in "The Acts of the Apostles" that changed his whole life. In his own words he relates: "The first thing that made me begin to doubt the judgment I had formed, or rather, had accepted from others, about the late origin of the Acts of the Apostles, was a discovery regarding the geographical statement in Acts 14:6, 'They . . . fled [from Iconium] unto Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and unto the region that lies round about.' In these words it is implied that Paul and Barnabas fled over a frontier into Lycaonia." Iconium, from which they fled, was not, it appears, in Lycaonia.

Here was a case, Sir William was sure, of another of the many mistakes in the Book of Acts. It was a recognized mistake by all scholars. Even many Christian workers reluctantly admitted an error here, for everyone knew that Iconium was the capital of Lycaonia.

“Smith’s Bible Dictionary,” which in its preface states that it contains “the fruit of the ripest Biblical scholarship of England,” and is probably the best known Bible Dictionary among Christians, states, “Iconium, the modern Konieh, was the capital of Lycaonia, in Asia Minor.” This was recognized by all. Every scholar admitted there was a mistake here in Acts.

The Acts; Trustworthy

However, one day Sir William was tramping over the country, and on top of a slope he passed a landmark, a stone monument five feet in height, that had fallen over. It bore an official inscription placed there by the Roman Senate to mark the boundary between Lycaonia and Phrygia. Sir William states that his emotions were stirred within him as he read it. What a story this stone slab told? The Bible was right! The whole modern world of scholars was wrong!

This simple statement in Acts 14: 6 and that old statement cut in stone changed his life. The stones were crying out that the Bible is truly the Word of the Living God.

Other remarkable discoveries followed, for this, he records, was just the beginning of a long line of delightful discovery. The Book of Acts was no mere shoddy product of pious imaginations. It was correct in every detail. It was trustworthy. The accuracy was striking.

Another brief illustration might be given. In Acts 16: 12, Philippi is referred to as “the chief city of that part of Macedonia” or “the first” (see margin) of the district. Even Hort, the Greek scholar, marks this as a mistake, as the Greek word “meris” was never used for a district. Sir William discovered from the inscriptions of the first century that it was commonly used for district or region, especially in Macedonia. Thus the Bible was right again and the scholars were wrong.

Luke has been proved correct in his geographical and political remarks on provinces, regions and cities (Acts 13:49; 14:6; 15:4; 16:2, 6-8); correct in his intimate reporting of local custom (Acts 14:11; 17:34; 19:35); correct in his reporting of local religious facts (Acts 14:11, 12; 19:26-28); correct in his knowledge of Greek and Asian cities (Acts 16:13, 19; 17:17, 19, 22; 18:12; 19:26, 27). Most of the vindication thus established has come from archaeological research.

The Facts of History

When mere mortals begin to criticize the Word of God, they certainly step on to dangerous ground, and while professing to be wise, they become fools.

Sir William Ramsay records, “The more I have studied the narrative of the Acts, and the more I have learned year after year, the more I admire and the better I understand. You may press the words of Luke in a degree beyond any other historians, and they stand the keenest scrutiny and the hardest treatment.”

Regarding Bible history, E. G. White wrote, “Here only can we find a history of our race, unsullied by human prejudice or human pride.” It is an “authentic history.” “The Bible is the most comprehensive and the most instructive history which men possess. It came fresh from the fountain of eternal truth, and a divine hand has preserved its purity through all the ages.” (Emphasis supplied.)

We need not be surprised that liberal writers attack the history of the Bible because they know the Scriptures are based on history. If its history can be overthrown, the whole structure must crash. The Bible is largely history, for it deals with facts-actual happenings. It does not deal merely with moral principles and ethics. Its moral and religious teachings are interwoven in the facts of history. These historic facts are sure. They are “established facts.” (Luke 1:1, Moffatt).

These facts or happenings reveal God's power, His purposes and His protection. Thus in some respects these historical sections of the Bible are the most important, for they are the basis of its sublime truths. For instance, the whole gospel and its salvation from sin would be pointless without the historical record of the fall of man. The Bible begins with history. Its first books are largely history, and on these historical facts the wonderful truths are based. The New Testament is similar to the Old Testament in its construction. Its first books, the Gospels and Acts, are largely history. The New Testament, like all Scripture, stands or falls on its historic record.

No Chaff Among the Wheat

Many rationalists and agnostics have expressed to me their appreciation and respect for the ethics of the Bible, but they refuse to accept its historicity. Some would have us believe that the Bible is only an unerring guide as far as salvation is concerned, but that it errs in its historical parts. But how can we have a religious infallibility of the Scriptures if we question its historicity, when the whole gospel of salvation is based on its history? "All Scripture is given by inspiration." 2 Timothy 3:16. Inspiration includes "all" and "all" means "all." The historical parts which form the foundation to its sublime truths, its ethics, its chronology; its scientific statements, all are inspired. Question one phase and the whole is weakened.

Intellectualism would place the professor between the people and the Book. Too many, if they meet anything they dislike in Scripture either try to gloss over or explain it away. Like Ananias, who kept back part of the money, they would keep part away from the people. But what an insult to God to deface any part of His eternal Word! "The inspired writers did not testify to falsehoods."

Thus there are no errors, no chaff among the wheat, no erring human element is mingled with the Divine. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God."

"It is worn where fond hands have caressed it,
And dog-eared where hearts found new ease.
Ah, no! It's not just the book of the month,
It's the Book of the Centuries.

"Its tale is as new as tomorrow
Every land knows the story divine,
Of this quiet eternal best seller,
This precious old Bible is mine."

REFERENCES:

See "Luke the Historian," by J. A. Thomson
"Acts of Apostles," by F. F. Bruce:
"Out of the Earth," by E. M. Blaiklock;
"Famous Infidels Who Found Christ," by Lee S. Wheeler.
"Testimonies," by Ellen G. White, Volume 5, page 25.
"Medical Ministry," by Ellen G. White, page 89.
"Testimonies," by Ellen G. White, Volume 5, page 25.
"Testimonies," by Ellen G. White, Volume 4, page 9. .