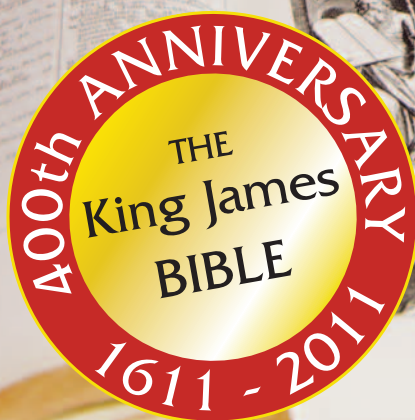
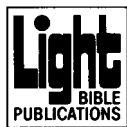


Light

...on the Bible



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The Christadelphians believe the Bible (Old and New Testaments) to be the wholly inspired and infallible Word of God. Its principal theme is the salvation of mankind through the saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ and the setting up of the kingdom of God under his rulership when he returns to the earth.

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*Cover: 400th Anniversary of the King James Version
Graphics by Emma Perfitt*

Note: Bible quotations are taken from the King James Version (KJV) except where another version is indicated after the text. Other versions used in this special issue are the New King James version (NKJV) the New International Version (NIV) and the Good News Bible (GNB)

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Introduction

KING James 1st of England came to the throne after the death of Queen Elizabeth 1st in 1601 AD. In 1604 he convened a conference of religious leaders at Hampton Court palace where he commissioned a new English translation of the Bible. Six teams of scholars got to work and after seven years the new version was published in May 1611.

The preface to the new version states that it was not their purpose *‘to make a new translation...but to make a good one better’*. Indebted to the work of William Tyndale and others their aim was to enhance the excellent English versions of the Bible which had sprung from the 16th Century Reformation during the reign of Henry VIII.

The King James translators were committed to producing an English Bible that would be a precise translation. On the one hand, the scholars were familiar with the original languages of the Bible and were especially gifted in the use of their native English. On the other hand, their reverence for the Divine author and His Word assured a translation in which only the principle of utmost accuracy could be accepted.

For 400 years and through a number of revisions, the King James Version of the Bible has been deeply revered among the English speaking peoples. The English language has changed significantly in the last 400 years and the popularity of this version has now declined in favour of translations in modern English. Nevertheless it still exists as a testimony to the work of men who revered God’s Word and carried out a monumental work of translation for the benefit of future generations. The words of the Psalmist remind us of the importance of the Bible as the Word of God:

'How fweet are thy words unto my tafte! yea, sweeter then hony to my mouth. Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every falfe way. Thy word is a lampe unto my feete, and a light unto my path.'

[Psalm 119.103-105 KJV 1611]

You can see by comparing this passage in 17th century English with the same text today, the King James or Authorised Version as it's sometimes called is very different in terms of grammar, spelling of words and punctuation. Nevertheless it is essentially the same translation. (See KJV text on page 52)

The purpose of this special issue of '*Light on a New World*' is not just to look at the King James Version of the Bible as a literary masterpiece. On the contrary, it is to draw attention to the message and teaching of the Bible and its relevance to the 21st Century. Our aim is to encourage study of this much neglected book which we believe to be the inspired Word of God.

In the following articles we will examine the origin and authenticity of the Bible and how the English text can be relied on as a translation from the original languages of the Old Testament (Hebrew and Aramaic) and the New Testament (Greek). The last article gives guidance on how to read the Bible in order to understand its message for today. In the New Testament, the words of the Apostle Paul to Timothy give us this sound advice and assurance:

'But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of...that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.'

[2 Timothy 3.14, 15]

What is the Bible?

THE Bible is regarded as the ‘Holy Book’ of the Christian Religion, just as the Koran is thought of as the basis of Islam. In this issue of ‘Light’ we are publishing a series of articles which will look at the Bible as a book. We will consider where it came from, how we got it in its present form and think about the influence it should have, its authority and whether it has a message for us today.

Most Christian homes have a Bible. It is still the world’s best seller in English, but sadly, it seems to be less and less read. We hope this publication will encourage our readers to study what is not only an important book, but also one that should have a real influence on our thinking and behaviour.

LOOK AT THE BOOK

Find your Bible and look at it – as if you had not seen it before. On the spine there are probably the words ‘HOLY BIBLE’. Both are words which we use almost without thinking what they mean.

The word ‘**Bible**’ is related to the Greek word ‘*biblios*’ and we find the first part of the word in our word ‘**bibliography**’ which means a book list – usually a list of books related to a particular subject. The word ‘Bible’ means ‘books; collection of books; library’.

The word ‘**Holy**’ means ‘consecrated, sacred; morally and spiritually perfect; belonging to, commissioned by or devoted to God’ [*Concise Oxford Dictionary*]. This word is also used (because of its derivation) to mean ‘special’ or ‘set apart for a special purpose’.

So the title of the book we are looking at really means that it is a special library or a collection of books – commissioned by God, set

apart for a particular purpose. One of the purposes of this publication is to try to understand why the Bible is special and what makes it special. It is certainly not just one book, but a collection of books.

Open the Bible and look at the index at the front. You will see the titles of all the separate booklets, which make up the whole Bible. They are divided into two groups: 39 in the first part called the Old Testament and 27 in the second part called the New Testament. The books of the Old Testament were all written before the time of Christ and the New Testament books after the time of Christ in the first century AD. Practically the whole of the Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew and the New Testament was written in Greek. So the whole of the Bible has had to be translated so that we can read it in English, French, Spanish, Russian, Chinese, Hindi-Urdu or in whatever language we speak.

‘Car Dieu a tellement aimé le monde qu’il a donné son Fils unique, afin que tout homme qui croit en lui ne meure pas mais qu’il ait la vie éternelle’

In the box above we read John chapter 3 verse 16 in French (BFC Version), not only spoken in France but also in various African countries and in other parts of the world.

If we now turn the pages of the Bible we will find the books are of different length and many of them have strange names – **Genesis**, **Deuteronomy**, **Habakkuk** and **Malachi** for example in the Old Testament and **Thessalonians**, **Philemon** and **Revelation** in the New Testament. Some of these words are the opening Hebrew words of the books:

Genesis means the beginning and the opening words of the book are ‘*In the beginning...*’ **Exodus** is linked to our word ‘Exit’ and means the ‘way out’. The book tells about the way in which the Hebrew people were brought out of Egypt and what happened afterwards. Other titles of books are the names of teachers or leaders or others who wrote the

books. **Malachi** and **Habakkuk** are the names of prophets (teachers) as are **Isaiah**, **Jeremiah** and **Ezekiel**. You can usually tell why the book is so called by looking at the opening verses of the book.

In the New Testament, most of us know the names of the first four books. They are the names of the writers who recorded the four accounts of the life, work and teaching of Jesus – **Matthew**, **Mark**, **Luke** and **John**. Most of the other booklets are letters named after the writers – like **Peter** or **James**.

Some are named after the groups of Christians to whom they were written. For example, **Ephesians** is a letter written to Christians at Ephesus by the Apostle Paul. **Philippians** is the name of the letter by the same writer to Christians at Philippi.

The Book of Revelation is different. It is an account of the visions that were given to the Apostle John at the end of his life when he was in exile on the Island of Patmos. It begins: *‘The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who testifies to everything he saw – that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ’.* [Revelation 1.1 NIV]

ALREADY SOMETHING SPECIAL

If we study the various books of the Bible carefully we find that about 40 different people were involved as writers. They wrote while living in different countries – Mesopotamia (now Iraq), Greece, Egypt, Italy and of course, Israel. The books were also written over a long period of time – about 1,500 years. The Bible then, in a very real sense, is not just one book, but a library of books. It is because this collection is bound together for convenience, that it is often printed on very thin paper to make the book manageable. The fact that we do have all these separate writings bound together in one volume is certainly one thing that makes it different and rather special. For ease of reference we usually group the books of the Bible as follows:

OLD TESTAMENT

❖ The Law

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy.

– These first five books are sometimes called ‘The Pentateuch’, a word which means the ‘five’ books which are also called ‘The Books of Moses’. In the Hebrew Scriptures these books are called ‘The Torah’.

❖ Historical Books

Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1st and 2nd Samuel, 1st and 2nd Kings, 1st and 2nd Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther.

– These books describe the history of Israel from the death of Moses to the establishment of the kingdom under Saul, David and Solomon; then its division into the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. Both kingdoms were eventually conquered and the people taken into exile to Assyria and Babylon. Only Judah was allowed to return from exile. The return is described in the books called by the names of Ezra and Nehemiah.

❖ Poetic Books

Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon.

– The Psalms are divided into five sections or ‘mini books’.

❖ The Prophets

Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

– The opening verses of these books will usually say at which period of history the prophets preached their message.

NEW TESTAMENT

❖ The Gospels

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

- The Gospel writers tell us about the birth of Jesus, his ministry and teaching, his crucifixion and resurrection.

❖ History

The Acts of the Apostles

- The book describes the spread of Christianity in the 1st Century AD including the missionary journeys of the Apostle Paul.

❖ Letters

Romans, 1st and 2nd Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1st and 2nd Thessalonians.

- These were written by Paul to the new churches.

1st and 2nd Timothy, Titus, Philemon

- These were written by Paul to individuals

Hebrews

- Written to the Jewish Christians particularly

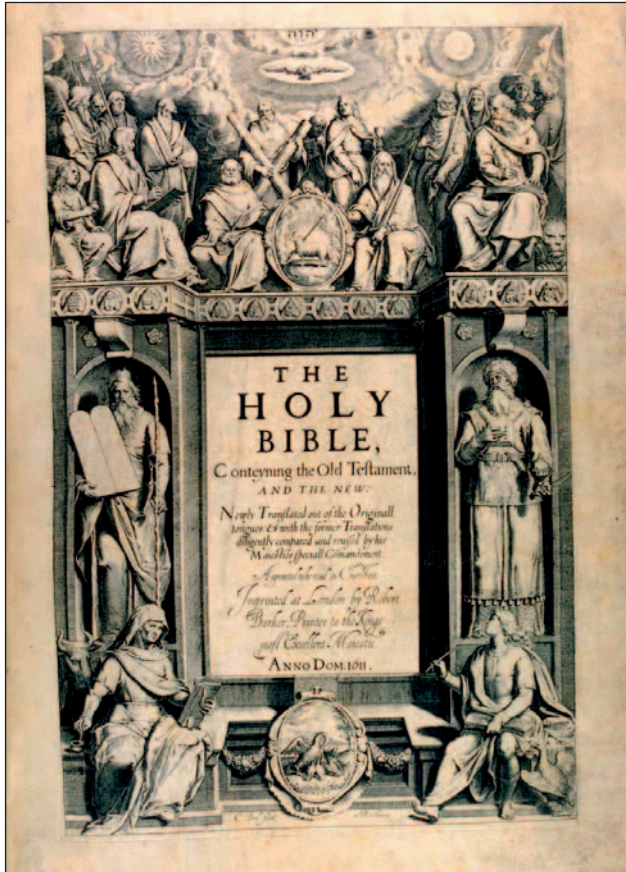
James, 1st and 2nd Peter, 1st, 2nd and 3rd John, Jude

- Other letters by writers whose names form the title of the book

❖ Prophecy

Revelation

- Visions seen by John during his exile on the Island of Patmos



Preface by the Translators to the King James Version AD 1611

‘How shall men meditate in that which they cannot understand? How shall they understand that which is kept close in an unknown tongue? Translation it is that openeth the windows and letteth in the light, that breaketh the shell that we may eat the kernel, that pulleth aside the curtain that we may look into the Holy Place, that removeth the cover of the well that we may come by water’

The beginnings of the Bible

The Old Testament books were completed about 400 years before the birth of Jesus and this collection of books, the Jewish Scriptures, was regarded as sacred. The order of books is different from ours and they are grouped differently, too. The Jews called the sections of the Scriptures – the Law (the first five books), the Writings and the Prophets. There is an interesting reference to this in Jeremiah.

THE WORK OF JEREMIAH

The prophet Jeremiah had an unpopular message to preach. The people of the kingdom of Judah were set a bad example by their rulers.



There was corruption in government circles and in many areas God's laws were completely disregarded. Jeremiah spoke against this state of affairs and as a result became hated for his outspokenness. The rulers and officials planned to have Jeremiah arrested and the book of Jeremiah records what they said. They felt that right was on their side – after all, they were the rulers and they said:

‘...Come, and let us devise devices against Jeremiah; for the law shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet. Come, and let us smite him with the tongue, and let us not give heed to any of his words.’ [Jeremiah 18.18]

In other words they said: *‘Our priests have the Law, we also have the Books of Wisdom (the Writings) and the words of the Prophets. So the Bible is on our side. Let us plot the downfall of Jeremiah’.*

Their attitude was like that of the Pharisees in the days of John the Baptist, *‘You ought not to speak like that to us. We are the descendants of Abraham’.* John replied that if God wanted to, He could raise up children to Abraham, *‘of these stones’.* [Matthew 3.9]

The teaching is clear. What is important is that the Pharisees should not rely on their line of descent, but should copy Abraham’s example. It is no good claiming to have the Bible unless we read it and put its teaching into practice. This was not being done either by the rulers at Jeremiah’s time or by those in John’s day.

The reason we have referred to the passage in Jeremiah is to show that even at this time, before the captivity of Judah by Babylon, the books of the Jewish Scriptures were already being grouped as they were in New Testament times.

THE CLAIM OF THE BIBLE

If we look at the books of the Old and New Testaments we find many verses where the writers claim to be writing the words of God:

‘The words of Jeremiah the son of Hilkiah, of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, to whom the word of the LORD came in the days of Josiah...’

[Jeremiah 1.1,2]

‘Moreover **the word of the LORD** came to me, saying...’
[Jeremiah 2.1]

‘**The word that came** to Jeremiah **from the LORD**,
saying...’ [Jeremiah 7.1]

‘Hear ye **the word which the LORD speaketh** unto you,
O house of Israel: **Thus saith the LORD**, Learn not the
way of the heathen ...’ [Jeremiah 10 1, 2]

The examples above are all taken from the book of Jeremiah, to make it easy to look them up; but look at any of the books of the prophets and there are many examples of the same claim.

THESE CLAIMS CONFIRMED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

When Jesus was preaching, he often backed up his argument by appealing to the authority of the Jewish Scriptures, our Old Testament. ‘*Have ye never read...*’ he said on many occasions. And again: ‘*why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition? For God said, “Honour your father and mother.”*’ [Matthew 15. 3, 4 NIV]

Jesus is quoting here from the book of Exodus (in the Law) which, he says, is the Word of God. He quotes from the Psalms (in the Writings) and the Prophets in the same way.

When talking to his disciples after the resurrection, he explained to them that what had happened to him – his arrest, his suffering, crucifixion, death and resurrection – were all part of the purpose of God. ‘*And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself*’. [Luke 24. 27 NIV]

The Old Testament books claim to be the Word of God and Jesus referred to them and quoted them as God’s Word.

THE TESTIMONY OF THE APOSTLE PAUL

Paul reminded the young man Timothy that right from being a child he had been brought up to know the Jewish Scriptures. They would tell him about:

- ❖ **Doctrine:** the word means ‘teaching’, so this meant that the Scriptures would tell him what he should believe;
- ❖ **Reproof:** they would tell him when he was choosing the wrong path;
- ❖ **Correction:** he could learn how to put himself right again;
- ❖ **Instruction in righteousness:** the Scriptures tell him how to live his life in a way that would please God.

Paul said to Timothy that the reason the Scriptures are able to do this is because they are inspired by God:

‘And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.’ [2 Timothy 3.15-17]

WHAT DOES INSPIRATION MEAN?

The word ‘*inspiration*’ means that God ‘*breathed into*’ the writers. He breathed His message into them and they wrote His words as Peter tells us:

‘...no prophecy of the Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. For prophecy never had its

THE BEGINNINGS OF THE BIBLE

origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.’

[2 Peter 1. 20, 21 NIV]

The words ‘*carried along*’ are very strong in the original Greek from which our New Testament is translated. The Greek means ‘*carried irresistibly along*’. The writers had to write what they were inspired to write. The prophet Jeremiah again, is a good example of this. Because of his unpopular message, he was arrested, imprisoned, put in the stocks and on one occasion lowered into a miry dungeon. The result of this was that he made up his mind that ‘*if this is how I am going to be treated: if this is what will happen as a result of my preaching – then I will stop. I will not speak any more in God’s name*’. But, he says:

‘...if I say, “I will not mention him or speak any more in his name,” his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed I cannot.’

[Jeremiah 20. 9 NIV]

Jeremiah was unable to stop himself speaking the message he was inspired to speak. That is what Peter meant by, ‘*Holy men of God spake as they were moved*’ [AV], ‘*carried along*’ [NIV], ‘*impelled by the Holy Spirit*’ [NEB].

THE NEW TESTAMENT

The verses and the claims we have looked at apply to the Old Testament and we have concentrated on this part of the Bible because many Christians already accept the New Testament as originating from God but will question the inspiration of the Old Testament. The Bible itself does not distinguish between the Old and New Testaments in this way.

Peter says that although Paul wrote many things that are hard to

understand, his writings have the same authority as the Old Testament Scriptures. In Peter's second letter, he wrote of Paul's teaching about salvation and the suffering and patience of Christ. He says that Paul wrote with God-given wisdom:

'He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things which are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures...'

[2 Peter 3.16 NIV]

Peter speaks of Paul's writing as having the same authority as '*the other Scriptures*'. In other words, they are Scriptures also. Paul himself wrote to the Christians at Thessalonica:

'...we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.'

[1Thessalonians 2. 13 NIV]

The next article will look at the fascinating story of translating the Bible from the Old Testament Hebrew manuscripts and the New Testament writings in Greek, to the Bible we can read in English today.

Translating the Bible

IN the fourth year of the reign of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, these words were given to Jeremiah, from the Lord: *'Take a scroll of a book and write therein all the words I have spoken unto thee against Israel, against Judah, and against all the nations...It may be that the house of Judah will hear...that everyone may turn from his evil way; that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin.'* [Jeremiah 36.2, 3]

Jeremiah tells us that on this occasion he actually dictated to Baruch his scribe and he wrote with a pen and ink on the scroll. The Apostle Paul dictated his letters and often there is a paragraph at the end of the letter where Paul writes his closing message himself: *'The salutation with my own hand – Paul...My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen'* [I Corinthians 16. 21, 24]

HOW THE BIBLE WAS WRITTEN

At one time critics would say that the Bible could not have been written when it claims to have been, because writing was not known so long ago. A visit to any of the major museums in the world now shows that writing has been known, certainly from much earlier than the time of Abraham. Excavations at Ur in Mesopotamia where Abraham came from, have unearthed libraries of clay tablets, as well as bank records, trading accounts and hire purchase agreements. Writing consisted of wedge shaped characters made in clay with a shaped stick or pen. Records required for a limited time were dried to make the tablets hard. Permanent records were baked even harder.

At the time when Moses lived in Egypt, writing was on papyrus with pen and ink. Records have survived on sheets made from the papyrus reed, scraped, soaked and laid criss-cross, pressed and dried. The natural gum made a good writing surface. There are many wonderful examples of the priestly, hieroglyphic picture writing in the British Museum in London as well as of the everyday, simpler script.

Other permanent writing materials were parchment – scraped, stretched and dried skin – and vellum, a much finer material made from the stretched animal intestine. Ink was made from finely ground charcoal in a thin gum or egg white. Scrolls were made from sheets of parchment sewn together and could become very bulky; so when lengthy records had to be kept, successive scrolls were numbered. That is why in our Bibles we have the First and Second Books of Kings and the First and Second Books of Chronicles.

If a book was important – and the sacred books (rolls) of the Jews were important – they would be copied with great care so that they could be read by more people in different places. In New Testament times, the letters to various groups of Christians were copied and passed to other groups: *‘After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea’*. [Colossians 4.16 NIV]

The difficulty is that Jeremiah, like all the Old Testament writers, wrote mainly in Hebrew, and Paul wrote in Greek – as did the other New Testament writers. For us to be able to read the Bible in our own language is a real blessing. Many people over a long period of time were involved in making this possible.

THE FIRST MAJOR TRANSLATION

When Egypt was part of the Greek Empire, around 250 BC, the Emperor Ptolemy Philadelphus established an important library at Alexandria. His aim was to collect a copy of every important book, wherever in the empire it came from. Josephus, the Jewish historian

describes the way in which the sacred books of the Jews were included in the library:

‘Demetrius Phalerius, who was library-keeper to the king, was now endeavouring, if it were possible, to gather together all the books that were in the habitable earth, and buying whatsoever was anywhere valuable, or agreeable to the king’s inclination, (who was very earnestly set upon collecting of books;) to which inclination of his, Demetrius was zealously subservient.’ [*Antiquities of the Jews*’ Josephus; Book XII, Chapter 2, Para.1]

This is so similar to accounts of the efforts of those who work for modern wealthy collectors! We can also understand how ‘*zealously subservient*’ Demetrius was. His life as well as his livelihood might depend upon how well he did. He was commanded to get in touch with the Jewish leaders in Israel to arrange for a translation of the Jewish Scriptures to be made. He wrote to the High Priest who, Josephus tells us, wrote the following reply:

‘It is not fit for us, O king, or to overlook things hastily, or to deceive ourselves, but to lay the truth open: for since we have determined not only to get the laws of the Jews translated, but interpreted also for thy satisfaction, by what means can we do this when so many of the Jews are now slaves in thy kingdom?’ [*Antiquities of the Jews*’ Josephus; Book XII, Chapter 2, Para. 2]

In other words, the High Priest was saying that they could work with much more enthusiasm if something could be done to deal with the ongoing problem of the number of Jewish political prisoners still being held. He did not say the work could not be done; the arrangements were already being made, but such was the keenness of the Emperor to obtain the Jewish Scriptures in Greek, that tradition has it that he agreed to 100,000 Jews being released.

Six Greek and Hebrew scholars were selected from each of the twelve tribes of Israel and because, tradition has it, that eventually 72 took part in the work, this important translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek became known as the *Septuagint Version*. When the work was finished, Josephus wrote:

‘When the labour of interpretation was over... Demetrius gathered all the Jews together to the place where the laws were translated, and where the interpreters were, and read them over. The multitude did also approve of those elders that were the interpreters of the law. They withal commended Demetrius for his proposal, as the inventor of what was greatly for their happiness... Moreover they all, both the priests and the ancientest of the elders, and the principal men of their commonwealth, made it their request, that since the interpretation was happily finished, it might continue in the state it now was, and might not be altered.’ [*Antiquities of the Jews*’ Josephus; Book XII, Chapter 2, Para. 13]

THE SCRIPTURES OF JESUS AND THE APOSTLES

In New Testament times copies of the Old Testament books were available in the synagogues in Hebrew but copies of the Septuagint translation of the books of the Old Testament into Greek were also available. Although the Greek Empire had now been succeeded by the Roman Empire, the language of the educated people for official purposes was still Greek. The language of the Jewish synagogue was Hebrew but the language of the home and the street was Aramaic (or a mixture of Aramaic and Latin).

On one occasion when Paul had been arrested and was about to be taken into the Roman barracks by the soldiers, he said to the commander, ‘*May I say something to you?*’ The commander immediately replied, ‘*Do you speak Greek?*’ He thought that Paul was an Egyptian terrorist that had started a revolt sometime earlier. Paul

asked permission to address the crowd, and he stood on the steps and *‘When they were all silent, he said to them in Aramaic: “Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defence”. When they heard him speak to them in Aramaic, they became very quiet.’* [Acts 21.37–40; 22.1,2 NIV]

The use of both Greek and Hebrew is very helpful to our understanding of the Old Testament. When quotations are made from the Old Testament by the New Testament writers, because the New Testament was written in Greek, it is usually the Septuagint Old Testament that is quoted.

Luke tells us that Jesus went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and he was given the roll of Isaiah to read. He found chapter 61 and read:

‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the **gospel** to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted’. [Luke 4.18]

Jesus would have been given the roll written in Hebrew but because Luke is writing in Greek, he makes the quotation from the Greek Septuagint version. If we compare this with Isaiah chapter 61 in our Old Testament, we read:

‘The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach **good tidings** unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted...’
[Isaiah 61.1]

You may have noticed that the New Testament (NT) reading from Luke has the word *‘gospel’* whereas the Old Testament (OT) rendering is *‘good tidings’* (or good news). The difference is because Jesus is quoting from the OT book of Isaiah. Although we read both Testaments in English, the quotation in Luke has been translated twice – from Hebrew to Greek to English. However, this reminds us that the

meaning of ‘*gospel*’ is ‘good news’ and if you look at a translation into more modern English like the New International Version (NIV), that is exactly what it says, ‘*The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor*’. [Luke 4.18 NIV]

THE VALUE OF AN HISTORICAL TRANSLATION

The example above is a simple one that confirms the meaning of a word with which you were probably already familiar – the word ‘*gospel*’. Sometimes the value of a translation made before the time of Jesus is much more important. Isaiah foretold that when the Saviour came, he would be born of a virgin:

‘Behold, the virgin shall conceive, and bear a Son,
and shall call his name Emmanuel’.

[Isaiah 7. 14 NKJV]

Bible critics have said that the word that Isaiah used and which is translated *virgin*, really only means a young woman, so the prophecy does not have the special significance that Christians claim. It is true that the word in Hebrew translated *virgin* can also mean a young woman. But what did Isaiah mean when he made that prophetic statement?

When Jewish scholars 250 years before the time of Christ were translating the Prophecy of Isaiah into Greek, they used a Greek word which could only mean ‘*a virgin*’. Two and a half centuries before the time of Christ, the Jews themselves understood Isaiah to have prophesied that the Messiah, when he came, would be born miraculously of a virgin.

The inspired NT writer Matthew leaves us in no doubt about the accuracy of the prophecy: ‘*All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had said through the prophet: “The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” – which means, “God with us”*’. [Matthew 1. 22, 23 NIV]

THE NEXT MAJOR STEP FORWARD

Up to the early centuries after Christ, the Old Testament manuscripts in Hebrew had been copied and copied for generations. The originals were no longer in existence but great care was taken in the copying and every manuscript was checked and re-checked. Because the books were sacred to the Jews, every letter of the text was counted before any copy was regarded as authoritative. The Greek translation was also available and many copies of this had been made too.

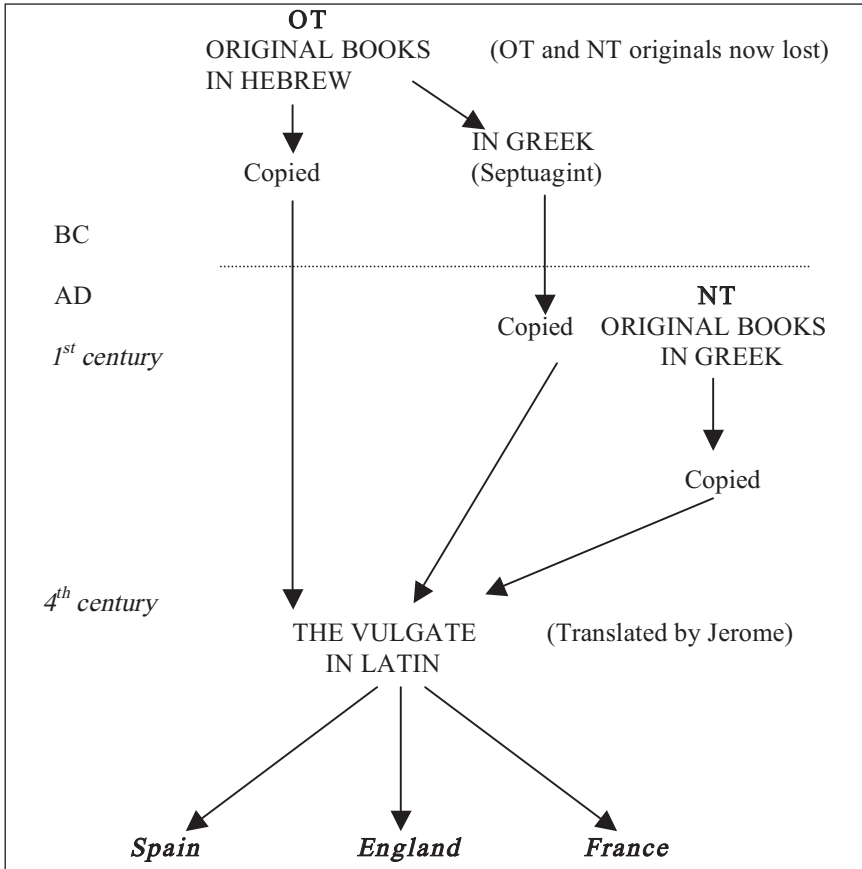
The New Testament manuscripts written in Greek were also being copied. As Christianity spread, so the copies were taken all over the Roman world. But, language was also changing. Latin was now the language of the Roman Empire and fewer and fewer people could read Greek. Because of this, a monk called Jerome made it his life's work to translate the Bible – both Old and New Testaments into Latin. His translation was called the 'Vulgate'. The English word 'vulgar' really means common or ordinary and the Vulgate was the Bible in the common or ordinary language – the language of the people. It was the Vulgate that was to be the Bible of Christianity for many centuries.

It was this Bible, which came with Augustine to bring Christianity to the British Isles; it was the Vulgate which went with Christianity to Spain, to North Africa and to other parts of the world. Sadly, with the break up of the Roman Empire, fewer could read the Bible for themselves. Latin was no longer spoken and they had to rely on priests and missionaries to explain what the Bible taught and often their teaching was biased.

TIMES CHANGE AND LANGUAGE DOES TOO

As the years went by the cycle of change repeated itself. When Greek was spoken, the Hebrew Old Testament could not be read by people who did not understand Hebrew. Under God's good hand the Jewish Scriptures were translated into Greek (see chart on page 22). In

the early centuries of the Christian era, the official language of the Roman Empire was Latin and so the work of Jerome was essential in enabling both Old and New Testaments to be read.



As has already been explained, it was the Latin Vulgate that came with Christianity to Britain with Augustine in AD 597 – but people in England did not speak Latin so the work of translation had to continue. The next article traces how the Bible was translated into English.

The English Translations

THE Anglo-Saxon spoken by the people of Britain was very different from the English spoken today, but the Bible was needed in Anglo-Saxon. By AD 709 Aldhelm, Bishop of Sherbourne, had translated many of the Psalms into West Saxon and 25 years later the Venerable Bede translated the Gospel of John. King Alfred, who many people know of because of the story about him burning the cakes, translated a number of the Psalms in the early part of the 10th century AD.

History was moving on and so was the language of the people. 1066 was the date of the Norman invasion of England and the language was now being changed by its mixing with Norman French. No more Saxon translations appeared but the foundations of our modern English Bible were being laid. John Wycliffe was Master of Baliol College, Oxford. He resigned from this post to become priest of Lutterworth, and by the year of his death in 1384 he had completed his life's work of translating the whole of the Bible from Latin into English with the help of a group of faithful followers. This Bible was hand-written and it would have taken about 10 months for a written copy to be made. So although the Bible was being made available in the language of the people, it was not freely available.

THE CHURCH IN CONTROL

The extent to which people understood the teaching of the Bible was under the control of the priests who could quote from the Latin text and could not be contradicted. However, two great developments meant great changes in the Bible translation story.

Firstly, more Bible manuscripts were coming to light and scholars were able to study the Bible not only in Latin, but by looking at copies of the Old Testament in Hebrew and of both Testaments in Greek. These could be compared with translations into Saxon but the authority of the church still limited the access that ordinary people had to the Word of God.

This was altered by the second great change. The development of printing meant that once the type had been set up, copies could be made available in great numbers instead of it taking nearly a year to copy the Bible by hand. By the end of the 15th century Bibles were being produced in French, German, Italian and Spanish and in 1530 the first printed Bible in English appeared. This was the work of William Tyndale, whose aim was to make the Bible widely available so that even a ploughboy could read it. William Tyndale said that if God spared his life, before many years he would cause the boy that drives the plough to know more of the Scriptures than did the Pope.

His work was not approved by the clergy who saw their authority being eroded. Tyndale's copies of the New Testament were confiscated and burnt at the instigation of the Bishop of London. However, as the copies were taken, so more were printed on the continent and smuggled into this country. Eventually, Tyndale himself was betrayed, arrested and tried for advocating that people could themselves learn the Gospel from the Bible and he was burnt at the stake on 6th October 1536.

Se that ye gaddre not treasure vpon the erth, where rust and mothes corrupte, and where thebes breake through and steale. But gaddre ye treasure togeder in heben, where nether rust nor mothes corrupte, and where thebes nether brek up not yet steale. For where soeber poure treasure ys, there will poure hertes be also. The light of the body ys thynne eye. Wherefore yf thynne eye besynge, all thy body shalbe full of light. But and yf thynne eye be wycked then all thy body shalbe full of darckenes. Wherefore yf the light that is in the, be darckenes: how greate is that darckenes.

[Matthew 6.19-23 Tyndale's translation]

ERASMUS

Deciderius Erasmus was born in Rotterdam in 1466. He was a scholar and a reformer who worked for many years in England and was Professor of Divinity at Cambridge. He published an important Greek text of the New Testament with his own translation into Latin. He could not understand why the church spent so much time studying the supposed miracles of those they called saints and ignored the wonders of God's plan of salvation (*'In Praise of Folly'*). Erasmus influenced Martin Luther and provided a basis for the work of Tyndale. He wrote:

'I wish the sacred Scriptures were translated into all languages of all people, that they might be read and known, not merely by the Scots and Irish, but even by the Turks and Saracens. I wish that the husbandman may sing parts of them at the plough, that the weaver may warble them at his shuttle, and that the traveller may with his narratives lighten the weariness of the way.'

If you look at the quotation from Tyndale's English translation on page 24 you will see that language is still changing. This is not the language that we speak today. There was also another problem. Bibles being translated by Protestant scholars often had footnotes which were anti-Roman Catholic. So when the Old Testament records the time when the people were told that there was no need to bring any more gifts because there was enough for the work of building [*Exodus 36.6,7*], a footnote in one Bible says, '*When will the pope say "Stop" and prevent people still bringing gifts to build St. Peter's?*' The Catholic scholars put anti-protestant footnotes in their Bibles.

There were arguments about the footnotes and there were arguments about which was the best translation. In 1604 a conference was held at Hampton Court Palace that resulted in King James ordering a new translation to be made. He said:

'In the Geneva translation some notes are partial, untrue, seditious and savouring of a traitorous conceit. To conclude the point, let errors of matters of faith be

amended and indifferent things be interpreted and a gloss
be added unto them'

THE KING JAMES VERSION

In 1611 the King James 'authorised' a new translation to be made. Forty seven scholars in six groups met at Oxford, Cambridge and Westminster. The title page says that it was '*Translated out of the Original Tongues* (so the scholars went back to copies of the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures) *and with the former Translations diligently compared and revised by His Majesty's special command.*'

Language was still changing, as those of our readers who studied Shakespeare at school will know very well. For example, 'To prevent' means to stop something happening. The English word comes from the Norman French '*pre*' and '*venir*' (to come) so at the time of Shakespeare and the KJV 'to prevent' meant 'to come before'.

Paul wrote (as translated in the KJV) that when Jesus returns, those that are alive will not '**prevent**' those that are dead [*I Thessalonians 4.15*]. He did not mean that those who are alive will not stop those who are dead. He meant that they will not 'come before', or have any advantage over those who are dead – because when Christ comes, '*The dead in Christ shall rise first*' [*verse 16*]. The New International Version translates the verse:

'...we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not **precede** those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.' [*I Thessalonians 4. 15, 16 NIV*]

MORE RECENT TRANSLATIONS

Many other words have changed their meaning and the 'old' verb

endings ('cometh' instead of 'comes') and the use of 'thee' and 'thou' in the King James Version make the language of the text unfamiliar. (Note: there is a difference between saying the language is unfamiliar and criticising the translation itself).

However, towards the end of the 19th century it was felt desirable to produce the Revised Version. The whole Bible was issued in 1885 although the New Testament was available earlier. So there has been a continuous effort in the last hundred years to make sure that the Bible is available in a language that is accessible to everyone. Some translations have been more successful at achieving this aim than others.

The New English Bible was conceived in the 1940's as a new translation from the original languages into the best contemporary English and was completed in 1970. A tremendous amount of work went into consulting not only language experts, but historians, geographers and archaeologists so that decisions could be made as to whether the word for a place should be translated as 'town' or 'village', for example. The translation was hailed as authoritative and good, but the text sadly, soon became dated. For example we read in the Letter to the Hebrews that Jesus is *'The effulgence of God's splendour and the stamp of God's very being'*. [Hebrews 1.3 NEB] Did we use the word 'effulgence' in 1970? The King James Version translates the same verse: *'who being the brightness of his glory and the express image of his person.'*

The New International Version, The New King James Version, The Good News Bible, among a number of others – have been produced by teams of scholars, checking and re-checking each others' work. In addition there have been a number of 'one man' translations. All have their supporters. All have various strengths and weaknesses as far as being translations into the language of the ordinary people.

What is important as far as the Bible student is concerned is that we are able to hold in our hands a book which brings before us the mind

of God himself. If we can read, we can be transported into events which demonstrate the unfolding of the purpose of God. We can be brought close to teaching that can change our lives. We can find the way of salvation and have the opportunity of learning the true Gospel message and eventually receive the gift of eternal life.

We can have all this by reading the Bible in our own language and by following its teaching. No minor blemishes of an imperfect translation can prevent this, whichever of the modern translations we read. Can we be sure of this?

*Teach me, LORD, the meaning of your laws,
and I will obey them at all times.
Explain your law to me, and I will obey it;
I will keep it with all my heart.
Keep me obedient to your commandments,
because in them I find happiness.
Keep me from paying attention to what is worthless;
be good to me, as you have promised.
Keep your promise to me, your servant –
the promise you make to those who obey you.*
[Psalm 119. 33–35, 37, 38 GNB]

AN IMPORTANT QUESTION – AN IMPORTANT ANSWER

Can we be sure that we hold in our hands a book which can convey to us the mind of God? We will look at just one criticism of the reliability of the Bible in English. It has been said that if you look at the early history of the Bible – not just in the centuries immediately before the invention of printing – but in the hundreds of years that followed the writing of the original manuscripts, because those manuscripts were copied and copied and copied, mistakes must have been made. Once printing was invented, the translations and versions were ‘static’ in a sense, but before that...? There are two main arguments (among others), which refute this criticism.

❖ The Samaritan Pentateuch

When the Assyrians invaded and destroyed the Kingdom of Israel, they completely evacuated the centre of the land and brought in remnants of other nations they had conquered. They were allowed to occupy the land and take over the deserted farms, but this block of foreigners would prevent the southern kingdom of Judah uniting with the remains of Israel and causing trouble for Assyria. This worked well as a political strategy. The foreigners became a separate entity with Samaria as their capital and centuries after, at the time of Christ, it was still said that *'the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans'* [John 4.9].

However, when the foreigners first came into the land they felt that they would only prosper if they adopted the gods of the land. They obtained copies of the first five books of the Jewish Scriptures called the Pentateuch (See page 6). For hundreds of years, having no contact with the Jews, they preserved and copied and re-copied these manuscripts and adopted many of the religious practices of the Jews.

If the copies of the copies of the copies of the Jewish Pentateuch had gradually included mistakes (and presumably the Samaritans might even be expected to have been less careful!), then, after a long period of time the Samaritan and Jewish Pentateuchs would have a number of significant differences. A number of important Jewish and Samaritan manuscripts have been discovered. They can be compared, and such was the carefulness of the copyists (under divine providence), that the critics cannot argue that the early documents are unreliable.

❖ The Dead Sea Scrolls

The story of the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls is well known ('LIGHT on the Dead Sea Scrolls' can be obtained free from Light Bible Publications). Among these ancient scrolls discovered in 1947 at Qumran are parts of most of the Old Testament books as well as

some complete scrolls. The complete scroll of Isaiah is probably the most famous and received the greatest publicity.

The Scrolls from Qumran date from well before the time of Christ and as far as Isaiah is concerned it jumps back a thousand years earlier than the oldest Hebrew manuscript of the prophecy then available. It suddenly became possible to compare copies of Isaiah a thousand years apart. If there were errors of copying it would immediately be apparent.

This is why the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls was so important (as well as being fascinating and faith stimulating). There can be no doubt that when we open our copies of the Bible and read what Isaiah has written – in our English language – we are reading, as closely as we can get to the thoughts and ideas that Isaiah wrote when he first penned them in Hebrew, words inspired by God. It was Isaiah who wrote, *‘To the law and to the testimony: If they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them’*. [Isaiah 8. 20]

It was Isaiah who describes so vividly the kingdom that Jesus will establish when he returns [Isaiah chapters 2, 11, 32, 65]. It is the inspired prophet Isaiah who foretold the first coming of Jesus as the Saviour. [Isaiah chapter 7.14-16 and chapter 53] It is Isaiah who reminds us that when man was unable to save, God’s arm brought salvation. [Isaiah 59.15-16, 20]

We said earlier – but we can now repeat it without fear of contradiction – that we are able to hold the Bible in our hands, a book which brings before us the mind of God himself. If we can read, we can be transported into events which demonstrate the unfolding of the purpose of God. We can be brought close to teaching that can change our lives. We can find the way of salvation and have the opportunity of learning the true Gospel message and in God’s mercy receive the gift of eternal life.

Can we trust the Bible?

‘Thy testimonies that thou hast commanded are righteous and very faithful.’ [Psalm 119. 138]

WHAT can we have confidence in these days? In the early 1900’s many Western currencies were based on the gold standard. UK travellers were told, *‘If you go anywhere with sterling you are safe’*. The UK abandoned the gold standard in 1931 and the U.S.A., in 1971 during the presidency of Richard Nixon. Nowadays we have to look at the rates of exchange before we book our overseas travel. These rates fluctuate daily according to world events.

At one time you could perhaps trust government officials – ministers of the Crown. People regarded the US President as a symbol of integrity at the head of a mighty, Western nation. In recent years various UK government ministers have become tainted by accusations of ‘sleaze.’ One only has to think of the way that President Nixon’s regime ended, to recognise that David was right when he wrote in the Psalms, *‘Do not put your trust in princes, nor in a son of man, in whom there is no help.’* [Psalm 146.3]

So the question that heads this article is an important one. What do we really mean when we ask the question ‘Can we trust the Bible’? Here are two definitions from the Concise Oxford Dictionary:

❖ **Confidence:** firm trust; assured expectation.

- ❖ **Trust:** firm belief in the honesty, veracity, justice, strength etc. of a person or thing.

When we talk about the Bible in these terms, we are asking whether we can believe firmly and strongly in the honesty and truth of what is written in the Bible, whether we can rely on what it says and be able to depend on it.

WHAT KIND OF EVIDENCE DO WE NEED?

Several years ago the writer was following a van, which was behind a car driving along a busy street in north London. A woman stepped off the kerb on to a pedestrian crossing, the car braked suddenly but only stopped when it actually touched the woman who fell but was not hurt. The van behind swerved to avoid hitting the car but was in turn bumped by a car coming the other way, fortunately not travelling fast. This accident happened right outside a police station.

A police officer took names and addresses of witnesses (including mine) and a couple of months later we were called to give evidence in court. The case was concluded before I was called and an officer on duty that morning said that the way that the witnesses had all agreed was quite remarkable. He said that sometimes the witnesses in accident cases do not even agree on the colour of the vehicles involved, let alone their estimate of the speed they were travelling. The police officer then made a statement that has stuck in my memory: ***‘When two or three people tell exactly the same story (and it doesn’t happen often) – it must have happened that way.’***

AN EXAMPLE FROM THE BIBLE

Mark records that on one occasion Jesus was followed by a great crowd when he wanted to go away quietly with his disciples. Because he felt they were like *‘sheep without a shepherd’* he began teaching them and continued for some while.

‘By this time it was late in the day, so his disciples came to him. “This is a remote place,” they said, “and it’s already very late. Send the people away so that they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.” But he answered, “You give them something to eat.” They said to him, “That would take eight months of a man’s wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?” “How many loaves do you have?” he asked. “Go and see.” When they found out, they said, “Five – and two fish.” Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the **green grass**. So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to set before the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish.’

[Mark 6. 35 – 44 NIV]

The miracle of the ‘Feeding of the Five Thousand’ is recorded in all four Gospel records. What is fascinating is to see some of the finer details of these four written accounts. Matthew says that the people were made to sit down on the **grass** *[Matthew 14.19]*. In the passage above, Mark writes that the people sat down on the **green grass** *[Mark 6. 39]*. John says ‘There was **much grass** in the place’ *[John 6.10]*. It is John also who tells us that it was the time of the Passover. All these statements fit exactly together. In the climate of Israel, for much of the year the grass is sparse, dried and brown. The time of year when grass is plentiful is in Spring-time – the **time of the Passover** – when in the words of the Gospel writers there would be **much grass** and the **grass would be green**.

There is another detail that links the Gospel writer’s accounts. Luke says that the miracle took place near Bethsaida. *[Luke 9.10]* John tells us that Philip was the disciple that Jesus asked about buying food.

[John 6.5] These two apparently unrelated facts become significant when we learn that Philip came from Bethsaida. [John 1. 43, 44] This was his home so he was the obvious one to ask about buying food in this locality.

**‘When two or three people (or four!) tell the same story
– it must have happened that way.’**

Here is a pointer to the answer to the question we started with – Can we trust the Bible? There are other examples of detailed corroboration in the Gospels and in many other places in the Bible. The books of Kings and Chronicles contain parallel accounts of much of the history of Israel. The prophet Isaiah was contemporary with King Hezekiah and these accounts confirm each other, sometimes in very small details.

In 1847, J.J. Blunt wrote a book about un-designed Scriptural coincidences. The Preface to the 19th edition says:

‘This work of J.J. Blunt... has been highly valued by many generations of Bible students who have found it first of all a fascinating study of Scripture in its own right; but much more than that - a source of persuasive evidence for the truth of God’s Word.

The author shows how hundreds of Bible passages illustrate coincidences which were un-designed by the writers, which involve the agreement of widely separated authors to the facts which they relate, and which point to the truth of recorded miracles and of prophecies.’ [*Un-designed Coincidences in the writings of the Old and New Testament*’ – 19th edition 1983]

The publishers of *‘Light on a New World’* are not surprised by these examples of detailed textural harmony. As was explained in the second

article in this booklet (page 9 onwards), the Bible claims to be the Word of God. The Apostle Paul wrote that the Scriptures were **‘inspired by God’** – that is, the writers wrote because God **‘breathed into them’** what He wanted them to write. That is the meaning of the word **‘inspired’**. In the previous article we referred to the Apostle Peter’s words that Bible prophecy *‘never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit’*. [2 Peter 1. 21 NIV]

ANOTHER KIND OF HARMONY

Think of what we have learned about the Bible so far:

THE BIBLE
a library of 66 books
divided into two groups
the Old Testament written before Christ and
the New Testament written after Christ
There were 40 writers of the books
The books were written over a period of 1,500 years
They were written in widely separated countries
– Babylon, Greece, Israel, Egypt, Italy, Asia Minor etc.

These different writers, separated by time and distance, are not only in textural harmony but their teaching on fundamental issues is also in complete harmony. Think about the teaching of the Bible about man and his natural state (in contrast to what many people believe today).

The book of Genesis explains that mankind is mortal – that is ‘dying’ and this is the result of man’s disobedience to God. This disobedience is called ‘sin’. So Paul wrote in New Testament times, *‘the wages of sin is death.’* [Romans 6. 23] ‘Death’ in the Bible refers to

complete extinction and unconsciousness at the end of life. David in the Psalms and Solomon in the book of Ecclesiastes, hundreds of years after the book of Genesis and later the writings of the prophets, all teach the same thing:

‘Like sheep they are laid in the grave...’	[<i>Psalm 49. 14</i>]
‘His spirit departs, he returns to his earth; In that very day his plans perish.’	[<i>Psalm 146. 4</i>]
‘...there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going.’	[<i>Ecclesiastes 9. 10</i>]
‘...The soul who sins shall die.’	[<i>Ezekiel 18. 4</i>]
‘...they shall be as though they had never been.’	[<i>Obadiah 16</i>]

In spite of the fact that the Egyptians (who held the Israelites as slaves for a long period) had a strong belief in an after life – as did the Assyrians and Babylonians later and the Romans in New Testament times – the consistent Bible teaching through the centuries is that man dies because of sin; the dead are unconscious and it is only a hope in the resurrection that can allow us to look beyond the eternal grave.

‘...as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned.’ [*Romans 5. 12*]

‘For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.’ [*Romans 6. 23*]

‘...now Christ has risen from the dead, and has become the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all

shall be made alive...Christ the first-fruits, afterwards those who are Christ's at his coming.'

[I Corinthians 15. 20-23]

One of the strongest evidences for the inspiration of the Bible is the consistency of its teaching, despite the long periods during which its books were written and the complete harmony of its records.

THE TESTIMONY OF ARCHAEOLOGY

When the M26 motorway was being constructed in the part of Kent where the writer worked at the time, beds of smooth grey clay were uncovered by the mechanical diggers. It had long been thought that there had been a Roman pottery in the area. Now the evidence was being uncovered. Not only was the raw material being revealed, but hundreds of examples of pieces of pottery made from the same clay were being unearthed. In the same way that fragments of pots and jars confirmed the site of a Roman pottery, so archaeology has confirmed many of the historical records in the Bible.



The cuneiform writing on the Taylor prism which is in the British Museum gives the Assyrian account of the events described in Chronicles and in the writing of the prophet Isaiah. The Assyrian record says: *'I besieged Hezekiah of Judah who had not submitted to my yoke and I captured forty six of his strong cities and fortresses, innumerable small cities which were round about them, with the battering rams and the assault engines and the attack of foot soldiers...himself (Hezekiah) like a caged bird I shut up within Jerusalem his royal city.*

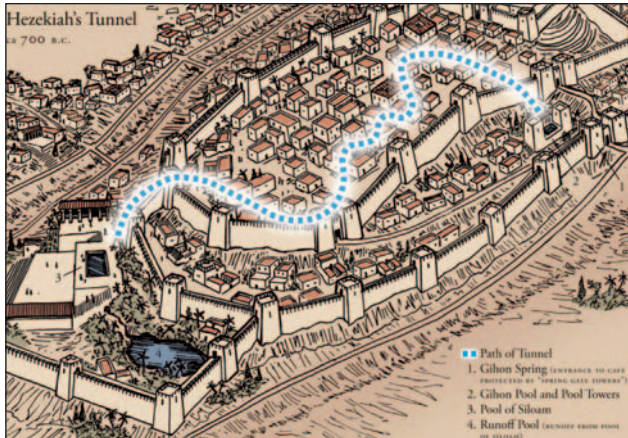
Many details in this record (and others) confirm the Bible account. However, the Assyrian record does not say how Sennacherib the Assyrian king was defeated after Hezekiah had prayed for God's help. The Assyrian account simply says that Sennacherib returned to his own royal city Nineveh. Isaiah had recorded, *'By the way that he came, by the same shall he return; and shall not come into this city, saith the LORD'.* [Isaiah 37. 33-36]

The period of the Assyrian and Babylonian empires is rich in tablets and monuments relating to nearly all their kings who are also mentioned in the Bible. The British Museum's own publications provide a wealth of fascinating material for the Bible student.

HEZEKIAH'S TUNNEL

There have been times when the Bible critics have said that something just could not have happened. The Bible gives an account of the way that Hezekiah had a water course constructed through the rock to bring water from the Spring of Gihon – later called the Virgin's Fountain' – into Jerusalem to make sure that there was a good water supply for the city when the Assyrians invaded. At the same time access to the springs outside the city was blocked up: *'This same Hezekiah also stopped the water outlet of Upper Gihon, and brought the water by tunnel to the west side of the City of David.'* [2 Chronicles 32.30 NKJV] (see parallel account in 2 Kings 20)





The critics said at one time that the science of engineering was not developed sufficiently at the time of Hezekiah to enable this conduit to be constructed. This cannot be said today because the conduit from outside the old city of Jerusalem into the Pool of Siloam has been discovered. In addition, near the entrance was an inscription written in the square Hebrew characters of Hezekiah's time which tells of the construction of the tunnel. This inscription was removed by the Turkish authorities so that it could be displayed in the Istanbul Museum.

Archaeology does not directly **prove** the inspiration of the Bible but the confirmation it provides for so many of the Biblical records, gives us confidence that we can trust its history.

THE EVIDENCE OF PROPHECY

This is the line of evidence that God Himself has given us to strengthen our faith in His Word. The Bible does not only teach us that God **knows** how His purpose is to be worked out but that He **declares** *'the end from the beginning'* [Isaiah 46.10] and that He **reveals** what He intends to do through His servants the prophets [Amos 3.7]. We can look at the history of Israel for specific examples of prophecy fulfilled and fulfilling – “*You are my **witnesses**,*” says the LORD’.

[Isaiah 43.10 NKJV] Two examples from Israel's history will illustrate the point.

FIRST EXAMPLE OF FULFILLED PROPHECY

Abraham was the father of a nation that had a very chequered history. There were times when they displayed confidence and trust in God and as a nation wanted to gain His approval. *"All that the LORD hath said we will do, and be obedient."* [Exodus 24.7]

There were other times when the people were faithless and disobedient to God's commandments. During the period when they were ruled by Judges, it was said that *'every man did that which was right in his own eyes.'* [Judges 17.6]

Abraham's son was Isaac, and his grandson was Jacob. Jacob had 12 sons and the story of Joseph, sold by his jealous brothers as a slave into Egypt, is recorded in the book of Genesis. Because of famine, eventually the whole family settled in Egypt where they prospered and multiplied. After the death of Joseph there began a period when the Hebrews (the descendants of Jacob) were forced into slavery by the Egyptians who were frightened that in time of war the Hebrews might support the enemy. This period of slavery did not end until the time of Moses and the Exodus: *'At the end of the 430 years, to the very day, all the LORD's divisions left Egypt.'* [Exodus 12. 41 NIV] It was 430 years from the time the promise was confirmed to Abraham and 400 years of oppression from Joseph to the Exodus.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Abraham was given a vision in which he heard the voice of God, *'I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.'* [Genesis 15.1] Then in response to Abraham's prayer and as a sign that God's hand would be seen in the history of Abraham's descendants, the record in Genesis says:

‘As the sun was setting, Abram (Abraham) fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him. Then the LORD said to him, “Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and ill-treated four hundred years. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterwards they will come out with great possessions.”’ [Genesis 15.12-14 NIV]

After the time of Jesus, when the Jewish authorities were persecuting the early Christians, the Apostle Stephen referred to this prophecy and its fulfillment. Stephen was on trial for his life. He was arguing that God had made promises to Abraham that are the basis of the true Christian hope. His accusers ought to have known their own history. They should have known that in their history was the evidence that God was in control all the way through. Stephen, in his defence speech, went through the main events from the time of Abraham:

‘...God promised him (Abraham) that he and his descendants after him would possess the land, even though at that time Abraham had no child. God spoke to him in this way: ‘Your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and ill-treated for four hundred years. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves,’ God said, ‘and afterwards they will come out of that country and worship me in this place.’ [Acts 7.5-7 NIV]

Here are the key points of this example:

ABRAHAM	was told of the oppression of his descendants. The actual time period was given [Genesis 15]
ISAAC	had two sons – Jacob and Esau [Genesis 25]
JACOB	had twelve sons – Joseph – Egypt. [Genesis 37-50]
MOSES and the EXODUS	The exact end of the 400 years was recorded [Exodus 12]

After the time of Christ, Stephen used this as evidence that God's hand can be seen at work in the history of the Jews confirming the words of the prophet: '*You are my witnesses.*' [Isaiah 43. 10 NKJV]

SECOND EXAMPLE OF FULFILLED PROPHECY

The first king of the nation of Israel was Saul. He was later followed by David and Solomon. After the death of Solomon the kingdom was divided into a northern kingdom of Israel (which was eventually destroyed by Assyria) and a southern kingdom of Judah which lasted 100 years longer than the kingdom of Israel. The prophet Jeremiah who lived in the closing days of the kingdom of Judah when Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, was invading the land, wrote:

'I will banish...sounds of joy and gladness...This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon for seventy years.'

[Jeremiah 25. 10, 11 NIV]

Here is a very specific time period. Not only was the land desolated by the Babylonian armies, but also thousands of captives were taken to Babylon. One of these was a very young man of noble birth – Daniel. He was to become prominent in the Babylonian court and eventually was made ruler of one of the three major provinces of the empire. In spite of the honours he gained, he was a Jew and his heart was always looking for the restoration of Jerusalem.

Babylon eventually fell to the Medes and became part of the Medo-Persian Empire. Daniel was now a very old man and there is a wonderful passage in the book that bears his name in the Bible:

'In the first year of Darius son of Xerxes (a Mede by descent), who was made ruler over the Babylonian kingdom – in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the LORD given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the

desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years. So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer...'

[Daniel 9. 1-3 NIV]

Daniel had read the book of Jeremiah and knew his prophecy of the 70 years captivity. He knew he was now living at the end of this time – so he prayed to God.

The rich archaeological evidence from this period enables the dates to be identified fairly accurately. Seventy years after the fall of Jerusalem, Cyrus the king who followed Darius, made a decree that the Jews should be allowed to return and rebuild Jerusalem. Other conquered nations were given similar privileges (again as Jeremiah had foretold).

In these examples we have two specific time periods. Each was foretold in advance and the end of each is also recorded. These are only two of many examples of prophecies detailed in advance. The history of Israel, with all its ups and downs; its invasions and captivities; its sieges and the long period of almost 2,000 years desolation following the Roman occupation, followed by the restoration of the nation in the 20th century – has been described as an 'impossible history'. **Yet almost every stage was foretold by prophecy.**

'You are my witnesses.'

THIS EVIDENCE SUPPORTS OUR TRUST

We can be confident. The only explanation for the wealth of fulfilled, detailed prophecy relating to nations, cities, individuals and events, is that the Bible is a revelation from God Himself. The writers were inspired. Its claim to be the Word of God is well founded.

The evidence of:

- ❖ The Bible's textural harmony
- ❖ The unity of its message
- ❖ Its miraculous preservation (see previous articles)
- ❖ The testimony of archaeology
- ❖ The witness of fulfilled prophecy

all testify that the Bible was written because the writers were moved by the Holy Spirit [2 *Peter* 1. 21]. It was written because the writers were inspired. This is the only explanation of its uniqueness.

CAN WE TRUST THE BIBLE?

In the fullest sense of the question – the answer must be 'Yes'.

If then the Bible is the Word of God, we have a responsibility to read it, to listen to its message and to act upon it!

If the reader is interested in Biblical archaeology, a useful introduction is 'LIGHT on Bible Archaeology' published by LIGHT Bible Publications. This can be obtained free from the publishers.

For a survey of a number of examples of the evidence of prophecy, 'LIGHT on Prophecy' can be obtained free from the publishers (Address inside the back cover of this magazine).

Reading the Bible

IN this special issue of ‘Light on a New World’ we have looked at the Bible as a book, its structure, how it came to be written, what ‘*inspiration*’ means and the evidence for the Bible’s reliability.

EVIDENCE FOR INSPIRATION

The previous article looked at the various arguments that support the reliability of the Bible among which are:

❖ **Archaeology**

Biblical archaeology has shown that we can rely on the Bible narrative. Historical accounts and details about places that were doubted at one time, have been shown to be accurate.

❖ **Preservation**

The miraculous preservation of the Bible shows that there is something special about this book.

❖ **Harmony**

The harmony between the teaching of 40 separate writers, who wrote at different times over a period of one thousand five hundred years and who came from widely differing backgrounds, tells us that there is something unique about the Bible’s message.

❖ **Bible Prophecy**

The fulfilment of Bible prophecies in both the Old and New Testaments; prophecies about individuals and nations, cities and events; prophecies which could not by any stretch of the imagination have been produced so unerringly by any man on his

own. These are evidence that *'prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.'* [2 Peter 1. 21]

THE BIBLE IN OUR OWN LANGUAGE

Wherever we are in the world and whatever language we speak, we can read the words of Moses and the laws that were given to the nation of Israel more than three thousand years ago. We can listen to the sublime message of the Old Testament prophets as they looked forward to the coming of the Saviour. We can understand the message of Jesus himself as he showed the shallowness and hypocrisy of the leaders of his day and as he spoke about the purpose of his death and resurrection. He taught his hearers about the coming of the Kingdom of God – and all this we have in our own language.

We can follow the exciting story of the development of Christianity in the first century, the establishment of the first churches and we can hold in our hands, in a form that can be easily understood, the letters that were written to those early Christian communities. Their needs were so like our own. The inspired teaching in these letters is just as relevant today. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Christians at Thessalonica:

*'...you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children, that you would live a life worthy of God who calls you into his own kingdom and glory. For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not **as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God**, which also effectively works in you who believe.'* [1 Thessalonians 2. 11–13 NKJV]

SO...DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT

On one occasion after his death and resurrection, Jesus said to Peter, *“Do you love me more than these?”* Peter replied, *“Yes Lord; you know that I love you.”* Jesus said, *“Feed my lambs.”* Jesus asked the question the second time and Peter again replied, *“Yes Lord, you know that I love you.”* Jesus said, *“Tend my sheep”*. The third time Jesus asked the question, Peter, upset that he had been asked the same question three times said, *“Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.”* Jesus said to him, *“Feed my sheep”*. [John 21.15-17NKJV]

There is an academic satisfaction in recognising that the threefold question and the way in which Jesus makes Peter answer, very nicely balances the threefold denial of Peter after Jesus was arrested – but that is not the message of the incident. The teaching of the narrative is that each time Jesus says to Peter, ‘If you love me, if you are truly my disciple, then do something about it. Feed my sheep. Share the Gospel message. Give my sheep the message of hope that you have learned from me.’ **The message of the articles about the Bible should have the same effect on us.**

It is good to know something about the background to the Bible but the important thing is to do something about it. Don’t just treat it as something of academic interest. Read the Bible for yourself so you can understand more of its message for today. If the Bible has come from God, if this holy book is God’s Word to us then...do something about it. Read the Bible so that you can know what God has revealed about Himself and about His purpose.

If the Bible does contain prophecies about individuals and nations, about cities and events – which have been fulfilled in the tiniest details, we can be confident that other prophecies are certain to be fulfilled, including prophecies about God’s plan for the world, about the return of Jesus and the events that will herald his ‘Second Coming’. We can be certain that when the Bible foretells a time in which all of the

world's problems will be solved, then that time **will** come. God *'has fixed a day in which he will judge the whole world with justice by means of a man he has chosen. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising that man from death.'* [Acts 17. 31 GNB]

THE IMPORTANCE OF READING

So...do something about it. Read the Bible and find out more about the personal message of salvation that it contains. This is exactly what the Bible itself tells us to do. Paul reminded his son in the faith Timothy, that from childhood he had *'known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.'* [2 Timothy 3.15- 17 NKJV]

In many practical ways the importance of reading is underlined. The Christians at Colossae were told to pass on to the church at Laodicea the letter that had been written to them, and Paul said that they in turn should read the letter to the Laodicean church [Colossians 4. 16].

Jesus criticised the leaders of his day for their lack of understanding in very telling words. Time and time again he prefaced his teaching with the words, *'Have you never read what Moses wrote...'*, *'Don't you remember what the prophets wrote'*, *'Have you never read...'* Of course they should have both read and remembered what Moses wrote, what the prophets had written and what the Psalms taught:

'How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to your word.

Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from your law.

Teach me, O LORD, the way of your statutes, and I shall keep it to the end. Give me understanding, and I shall keep your law; Indeed, I shall observe it with my whole heart.

Your word has given me life.

The entrance of your words gives light.

Let your hand become my help, for I have chosen your precepts.' [Psalm 119. 9, 18, 33, 34, 50, 130, 173 NKJV]

IN OUR OWN LANGUAGE

We can only let God's hand become our help, if we know what has been written. We can only allow His Word to give us life, if we know what He has said. We have the privilege of being able to read the Bible in the language we speak and write so when Jesus says to us – as he did to people in his day – '*Have you never read?*' We have no excuse. We have no excuse not to read the Bible for ourselves. We are privileged to have God's Word in our hands so let's make sure it is not only in our hands, but in our hearts and minds too. We can only do this by reading.

A NEW START FOR A NEW YEAR

What better time to commence reading the Bible in a structured way than at the start of a New Year! How do we begin? The obvious place to start is at the beginning.

The first book of the Bible is the book of 'Genesis'. This will tell us about the beginning of things. The book opens with a simple but profound statement: '*In the beginning God...*' and we will remember from the first article that the Hebrew word for this opening is '*Genesis*' – the name of the book. We will then read about the failure of the first human pair to be obedient to God and the results of their sin. We will read about Noah and the flood; about the call of Abraham and the

wonderful promises that God made to him because of the tremendous faith and trust that he showed in God.

These promises were repeated to Isaac and Jacob, Abraham's son and grandson. We may already know from other 'Light' articles, that in the New Testament these promises to Abraham are referred to as 'The Gospel' [*Galatians 3.8*]. Genesis finishes with the story of Joseph, another example of God's purpose being worked out in the life of a man who trusted in Him in spite of everything seeming to be against him.

We could instead start reading from the first book of the New Testament – Matthew. This will tell us about the birth of Jesus. Matthew emphasises how many of the events in Jesus' life were the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies. Then we will read about the temptation of Jesus, his teaching, his miracles and the parables he told. The book finishes with an account of the betrayal, trial and crucifixion of Jesus and then the miracle of his resurrection.

We have to remember that the Bible books will be different in style and in what they are about. Some books will be more difficult to understand than others. The first book of Chronicles begins with nine chapters of names – lists of the genealogies of the tribes of Israel – this is very difficult to read. The book of Ruth tells the story of a foreign girl's love for both her mother-in-law Naomi and for the religious faith of her husband's family and people after he died. It is a beautiful and emotional story which includes the moving words of Ruth to Naomi:

'Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following after you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God'. [*Ruth 1. 16 NKJV*]

At the very end of the book of Ruth, we learn that the dedication and faith of this woman from Moab resulted in her being one of the ancestors of the Lord Jesus Christ.

READING SYSTEMATICALLY

If we think of reading the Word of God as being a way of taking in ‘spiritual food’, then there are some practical lessons we can learn from the way we take in our natural food. First – we need to eat regularly. It is not a healthy approach to nutrition to have a ‘binge’ at the weekend and eat until we are bloated, then not eat again until the next weekend. For a healthy life we need to have a balanced diet. We need to eat portions that we can properly digest and we need to take in those portions on a regular daily basis. Jesus taught his disciples to pray, ‘*Give us day by day our daily bread*’. [Luke 11.3 NKJV] It is even more important with our spiritual food.

Christadelphians use a set of tables called ‘The Bible Companion’ to direct and organise our reading. By this plan we read three portions from the Bible each day. At the start of the year, these begin at Genesis, Psalms and Matthew and each portion will generally consist of one or two chapters. If we follow this scheme, by the end of the year we will have read the Old Testament once and the New Testament twice (see advertisement on page 52). The reading will take about 30 minutes each day – less time than we take eating our natural food. Jesus spoke of himself and of his teaching as ‘*The bread of life*’. [John 6.35]

The Bible makes it clear that reading God’s Word is not just about going through the process of following the words. It is not about coming to the end of the chapter, closing the Bible and saying to ourselves, ‘*I have done my Bible reading for today*’. David wrote ‘*your testimonies are my meditation*’. [Psalm 119. 99 NKJV] The Apostle Paul wrote to the Christians at Philippi about things which are true, noble, just and pure and he said ‘***Think about such things***’. [Philippians 4. 8 NIV]

Whether we are reading just one or two chapters each day, or whether we are using a systematic plan like the one described above – having come to the end of our reading **we need to think about it**. It can be helpful to ask ourselves some questions – ‘What have I been

reading about? Have I understood what I have been reading? Does the story or the message of what I have read connect with any other part of the Bible I can think of? (This is something which is easier when we have been reading for some while!) Are there any lessons I can learn? Is there anything I need to do (or change) as a result of what I have read?' If we get into the habit of reading the Bible regularly, of thinking carefully about what we read, of trying to put its teaching into practice in our lives **and** of asking God in our prayers to help us to do this, then, like Timothy, we will find that the Scriptures will make us wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

We have made a number of quotations from Psalm 119 in this article. We have not quoted what is perhaps the most well known passage in this Psalm; we have saved that quotation for the end. The Psalmist was able to write these words with absolute confidence. May your regular reading of the Scriptures enable you to do the same.

'How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth! Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way. Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.'

[Psalm 119.103-105]

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