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Clarion

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THE WORK OF PREACHING AND TEACHING HANGS ON THE RELIABILITY OF SCRIPTURE

Peter H. Holtvlüwer

Inspiration: All or Nothing

Rev. Peter H. Holtvlüwer is minister of the Spring Creek Canadian Reformed Church at Tintern, Ontario
holtvluwer@bell.net

This is a miracle to be accepted by faith or rejected by unbelief

This is the time of year when our young scholars set off to higher levels of education, many of them in secular colleges and universities. They go off with the Bible as the basis for what they believe and how they live, but sooner or later they will face the challenge: "Prove to me that the Bible is really from God, that it's all true! It's just another book!" They may even be told that serious scholars can't let their religious beliefs cloud their judgment.

One of the reasons we put together this theme issue of *Clarion* is to help show why there are good reasons and sound arguments to accept that the Bible is what it claims to be: the very Word of God. But I want to be up front about the heart of the matter: neither I (nor anyone) can scientifically prove to you that the Bible is God's Word and therefore is true and reliable in all it says. I can't do that any more than I can scientifically prove to you that Jesus rose from the dead. Or that he walked on water. These things are matters of faith. Faith believes *all* that God has revealed in Scripture (Lord's Day 7). And that faith rests on the *miracle* of the divine inspiration of Holy Scripture.

Inspiration – a miracle

A miracle by its very definition is something extraordinary that takes place in *defiance* of what many regard as scientific norms. Scientists have observed millions of times over that when people die, they do not come back to life. No scientist has observed a resurrection or otherwise seen proof that a person once dead and buried has returned to life. Therefore, science does not accept that a dead person has ever been raised to life. Or that a living person has walked on water. Or that leprosy has been instantly healed. These are *miracles*, and you either believe miracles are possible and accept that Jesus has done each of these things or, quite simply, you do not.

In the same way, the Holy Spirit inspired some forty men over the course of roughly 1400 years to write down the very words of God. God also guided the preservation of these writings through the centuries so that today we hold in our hands a faithful translation of God's Word. For that reason, every word of it is true and reliable. This is a miracle to be accepted by faith or rejected by unbelief. There is no in-between position. As Christians, there is no need to hide from this or be ashamed of it. Like the kids sing: "I stand alone on the Word of God, the B-I-B-L-E!"

Some truth?

It seems that unbelievers are fairly clear about this, but some confessing Christians think there is a middle position. A church-going neighbour once commented to me that he believed the Bible "contained truth" but that it wasn't necessarily *all* true. My question to him was: "How can you tell which parts are true and which are not?" The man did not have an answer – and for good reason: there is no way to tell! If your starting point is that the Bible contains a mixture of truth and error, what outside measuring rod can you use to determine which is which? In the end, you determine it for yourself.

What you are left with is a book of your own making, a collection of "truths" cherry-picked to suit your own tastes but which is in fact no truth at all. The next person does not agree with your selection of truth but rather

prefers his own choices. And so he goes his own way with his "Bible" while you go your way with your "Bible" but neither of you possesses God's truth. The Word of God stripped down in this way becomes simply another man-made religion. Either the whole Bible is God's Word and therefore true or none of it is. It's all or nothing.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE...

Dear Readers, in your hands is a special issue of *Clarion*. We are excited to bring you a collection of articles on the reliability of Scripture.

The pages of Issue 18 are almost entirely devoted to our topic. You will find articles about the Old and New Testament, on the authenticity and translation of manuscripts, about the inspiration of Scripture, and about apocryphal and pseudepigraphical works. You can compare history with the Word of God and read about some conspiracy theories too.

Thank you to Drs. John Smith and Gerhard Visscher for their articles on the Old and New Testament. We also send our appreciation to Revs. Mark Jagt, Dirk Poppe, and Ryan Kampen for their contributions, as well as to Rev. Jan Huijgen for his Treasures New and Old meditation.

Our editorial was written by Rev. Peter Holtvlüwer; in addition, he has taken the time to compile the material for this special issue. We hope you enjoy your reading.

Laura Veenendaal

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Cover photo: Cave at Qumran where Dead Sea Scrolls were found

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EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

Editor: J. Visscher; Copy Manager: Laura Veenendaal
Coeditors: P. Holtvlüwer, E. Kampen, K. Stam, C. Van Dam

ADDRESS FOR COPY MANAGER

Clarion
8 Inverness Crescent, St. Albert AB T8N 5J5
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Inspired meaning?

I read somewhere that some Christians who accept God's inspiration of the Bible distinguish between the inspired *ideas* and the uninspired *words* and language. God's *message* is inspired, that is, the *meaning* behind the words, but the precise wording or form of language used is of strictly human origin and prone to error.

When God speaks, he only speaks truth and what he speaks is true for all of life

The question here is: how can you separate ideas from the words used to convey them? If you conclude that certain words are erroneous or imprecise or less than accurate, how do you determine the truth supposedly in-behind such words? After all, the words are the only access we have to the meaning God wishes to convey! Thus, for God's *message* to be comprehended accurately, the *words* used must be the precise words God chose to communicate that message. Each word must be divinely inspired or else we can never be certain of the meaning. Inspiration is an all or nothing affair.

Inspired intention – for faith alone?

Some believers who accept the inspiration of Scripture offer a sophisticated nuance. They focus on God's *intention*. They want to separate the intention of God to convey matters about faith as opposed to him intending to communicate matters about science or history (or similar scholarly pursuits). In other words, when God inspired men to write the various books of the Bible, his intention was to communicate all things necessary for our faith (for his own glory and our salvation), but he was not writing to satisfy the requirements of present-day scholarship. Therefore, one can't look to the Bible to answer questions of science and the Bible *shouldn't be expected to be accurate according to today's scientific standards. Or today's standards of historical scholarship.* The Bible has to be understood on its own terms and according to the intention for which it was written.

There is truth in this. Interpretation must keep in mind the purpose of God in writing what he wrote. Certainly, sound interpretation keeps in mind the genre of the writing (e.g. apocalypse or poetry or wisdom or narrative, etc.) and explains the text in keeping with its particular nature and in light of the wider context. But there is also something false in this – can the Word of God say in one breath something that is true for matters of faith and yet not for matters of science or history?

Truth cannot be divided. When God speaks, he only speaks truth and what he speaks is true for all of life. If a historical fact is mentioned, we must take it as true because it was inspired by God, even if modern historical scholarship cannot verify it. If an observation about creation or an event in this world (i.e. a matter of science) is recorded in the Bible, we must hold it as true because it was inspired by God – even if modern scientific investigation cannot explain it. This is a matter of faith.

Take the star seen by the Magi. This is both a historical fact and a scientific observation. Outside of the Bible, this event has no historical verification. In scientific theories, this event is completely unexplainable. Stars don't move in the sky with such precision as is described in Matthew 2:9. Yet it is true nonetheless. It's a miracle that humans cannot fathom but, because God wrote it in his book, we believe it happened and we believe it happened in the manner he has described. A Christian historian and a Christian scientist will take that as his starting point and work out theories from there. It's all or nothing.

Scripture's own testimony

Nuance may be the in-thing in scholarship today but the Bible itself does not teach us to nuance our understanding of inspiration in any of the above ways. Consider 2 Timothy 3:16-17, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." *All* Scripture – that's everything, folks! Not just ideas or intentions but each and every *written word* comes from the Almighty.

The proposed nuances don't work out in real life very well either. For example, it's pretty hard to convince Catechism students that God created the world (as Genesis 1 teaches) but didn't do it in six days (as Genesis 1 also teaches along with Exodus 20:11 and 31:17), but rather over a long, undetermined age. Or that Adam and Eve were not the first humans and the parents of the entire human race as Genesis 1 and Acts 17:26 teach but yet

somehow were representatives of many already-existing humans (which is not taught anywhere in Scripture!). You try explaining to them that parts of Genesis 1 are true in their plain, literal meaning because they pertain to faith and the other parts of the same chapter are allegorical or symbolical because the Bible was not written to the standards of modern scientific or historical inquiry! They would look at you as if you're off your rocker – and I could hardly blame them!

Reliability rests on inspiration

The work of preaching and teaching hangs on the reliability of Scripture being the very Word of God. That reliability, in turn, hangs on the fact that *every word* is breathed out by the Spirit of God. The Bible makes no separation between words and ideas or between what's true for faith matters and what's true for so-called science or historical matters. The truth hangs together as one package given by God. It's all or nothing.

The work of preaching and teaching hangs on the reliability of Scripture being the very Word of God

The Apostle Peter speaks in a similar way in 2 Peter 2:21, "For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." All that we have recorded in the original manuscripts of the Bible are the exact words carefully chosen by the Creator of heaven and earth put in print through the means of his chosen servants.

Christian scholarship

When we have that firmly fixed in our minds, then we may enter the scholarly fields of scientific or historical (or other) investigation with clarity and confidence. Truth *can* be uncovered, for the God who inspired the Bible also created this world we are exploring! He even commands us to do so (Gen 1:28). If we hold fast to his Word, we will be on the right track in correctly analyzing his creation.

There will always be puzzles, conundrums, and things unexplainable (like miracles) because we are finite creatures with finite knowledge and limited abilities,

including the corruption of our sinful hearts. But with the inspired Word of God and its revelation as our basis and starting point, we may undertake genuine, scholarly pursuits and expect to find *truth* – knowing it was put there by God in the first place – in each field.

Let's keep in mind that unbelieving scholars begin with their own beliefs (atheism, agnosticism, materialism, etc.), which greatly affect their theories and conclusions. They often deny that it is so, but it is impossible to enter into any investigation without some basic, pre-existing beliefs and outlooks on the world (i.e. presuppositions). We all know that a bad foundation leads to a crooked, lop-sided structure. Their findings will be limited by their faulty starting point and will never be used by them to glorify the Maker.

But as Christian scholars, enlightened by the eyes of faith (given by grace alone), we may legitimately begin our studies with our own beliefs. And there's no shame in stating it up front for the world to hear: *I believe that the Bible is God's inspired Word and therefore true and reliable in all it says*. That's a solid, square foundation which will lead, under God's blessing, to a sound structure, that is, to the advancement of human knowledge across many fields of study – all to the glory of God! Who wouldn't want to build on that? C

Jan Huijgen

Rev. Jan Huijgen is minister of the Canadian Reformed Church at Attercliffe, Ontario
huijgen.j@gmail.com

Forty Days and Forty Nights

"When I went up on the mountain to receive the tablets of stone. . . I stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights."

(Deuteronomy 9:9)

In Deuteronomy we read twice that Moses fasted for forty days and forty nights. The first precedes Moses receiving the two tablets of stone inscribed with the law. Before Moses received the law of God for the second time he fasted again. Why did Moses fast twice, for so long? And why did God give the law twice, especially considering the LORD knew that while they were waiting the people had decided to represent God with an idol? Moses brought the words of the covenant from on high, but Israel had already broken the covenant. Moses visualizes this when he breaks the two tablets before their eyes.

But then there is the second fasting for forty days and nights. Why again? The law of God was broken; the anger of the LORD was kindled. Moses intercedes in prayer, but also in fasting. Moses pleads that for God's glory he may not destroy them, but instead remember his promise given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Moses fasted twice for forty days and forty nights. And twice God gave the law to lead his people in the way of the covenant. The people had once broken the law and Moses seemed to have averted the wrath of God. But really?

In 1 Kings 19 we read about the prophet Elijah. He also is called to do the LORD's work in the midst of the people, even while they break the law in their pursuit of idol worship. Elijah flees, firmly discouraged, into the wilderness. At first he is ready to die because he has nothing to hope for anymore. Following this he is fed by an angel of the LORD, and then travels for forty days and forty nights until he reaches the mountain of God, the place where God revealed himself to Moses and a sinful people in all his glory. Again it is the LORD who continues to be the God of life for his people. He encourages and resends his prophet to lead that stubborn people. Elijah is different from Moses, but the people are the same in their sins.

Now there is one more time that a servant of God fasted for forty days and forty nights. In Matthew 4 the Lord Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And this takes place "after fasting forty days and forty nights" (Matt 4:2). There is much the same here as the previous times. The people of God are still a sinful people, and God continues to show his goodness. But there is also a big difference. For what Moses and Elijah could not accomplish, the Lord Jesus did.

He starts in the wilderness, where God had revealed himself to Israel. But Jesus does not break God's law. He loves God above all and using his law stops the attempt of the tempter, which is to have him make an idol of himself. Moses and Elijah were appointed by God, and God also appointed Jesus and declared about him before the first fast in the wilderness that he is the Son with whom God is well pleased. Close to the second wilderness experience, the one on Golgotha, God the Father again declares this about Jesus. It happens during the transfiguration on a high mountain, when Moses and Elijah appear and converse with Jesus. God then declares Jesus to be the pleasing Servant – the Son of God – to whom all must listen.

The chief Prophet speaks with two key prophets of the Old Testament: Moses, the one from the beginning of Israel's time in the Promised Land; and Elijah, the one from the beginning of Israel's time of utter decline in the Promised Land. Both fasted forty days and nights; both did prophet's work. They taught a stubborn people that the law of God is good for life. But then we see Jesus, the pleasing Servant and Son of God, who at the first fast prophesied the law of God to be good for life. And then in the presence of Moses and Elijah, Jesus is again declared to be pleasing to God, for he supersedes them as the only high priest.

Fasting forty days and forty nights is about as long as one can live without food and not die. It teaches that even though we should've died because of our sins, we live because of the One who was cut off from the land of the living when he experienced the wilderness to the full extent. C

John Smith

Did God Speak All These Words?

Dr. John Smith is Professor of Old Testament Studies at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary in Hamilton, Ontario
jsmith@crts.ca

Every Sunday morning we hear the Ten Commandments introduced with the words, "God spoke all these words." We trust, then, that the words which follow are exactly what God said on Mount Sinai. But can we be sure? How do we know? We no longer have the two tablets of stone that were placed in the ark of the covenant. The first copies of Exodus and Deuteronomy have vanished in the sands of time. So have the first copies of the rest of the books of the Old Testament. The oldest known manuscripts are centuries—sometimes many centuries—newer than the books themselves.

Although the words of God do not perish, his words were written down on perishable materials that eventually wore out and crumbled. God's people depended on the diligent efforts of scribes to make accurate copies, but these scribes had weaknesses and shortcomings. They had the highest respect for God's holy Word, and they knew it well, but they were not inspired or divinely kept from error. As a result, there are many differences among the surviving manuscripts, some small and some big. Anyone who has ever tried to copy a page out of a book will tell you that it's very hard not to make a single mistake.

Copying errors could occur in a variety of ways. Some Hebrew consonants look quite similar, so scribes could misread a word. As a copyist's eye went back and forth from what he was reading to what he was writing, he might copy a word or phrase twice by mistake, or skip a word or a line or more. Often words were clearly separated from each other, but sometimes not, so it was not always easy for a scribe to tell where one word ended and the next began. Hebrew does not begin a sentence with a capital letter, break it up with commas, or end it with a period, the way English does. True, books were divided into chapters, paragraphs and verses, but the oldest copies did not have punctuation, so it was not always easy to tell where one sentence ended and another began, or even what kind of sentence it was. Sometimes a scribe would write an explanatory note in the margin of his text, and the next scribe would copy that note into the text itself.

Besides these kinds of accidental errors, learned scribes occasionally made deliberate changes to the text in places where they thought a mistake had been made. Furthermore, as Jewish communities—and later, Christian churches – spread beyond the borders of Israel and adopted other languages, they also made translations of the Old Testament Scriptures, for example in Greek (the Septuagint), Aramaic (the Targums), Syriac (the Peshitta), and Latin (the Vulgate). Translation always involves interpretation.

There are many differences among the surviving manuscripts, some small and some big

For instance, since the Hebrew alphabet has only consonants, no vowels, a translator could sometimes read a Hebrew word in several different ways. We no longer have the original copies of these translations, but copies of copies of copies, etc., and these manuscripts, too, have mistakes. In short, trusting that the Old Testament is reliable does not mean trusting that individual manuscripts are free from error – they aren't. Rather, it means trusting that the original text can be recovered from a multitude of faulty manuscripts. Can it? Yes, it can, and it has been, for the most part. Let me unpack that statement.

It can be recovered. . .

Imagine that a teacher projected a dictionary page up on a screen and told her students to copy it out. She then collected all their copies, took the best ones, and brought one to each of the other classes in the school, and told them to copy the copies. She also took a copy to the French

immersion class, and they didn't copy it but translated it into French. Some of the brighter students noticed that the copies they were copying from had spelling mistakes, and some phrases that didn't quite make sense, so as they copied they also fixed them up a bit. Some used American spelling, while others used British.

At the end of the day the teacher collected all the copies, put them in a laundry basket in no particular order, brought them to your doorstep and said to you, "I'd like you to look at all these copies and tell me what the original dictionary page said." Could you do it? It would be a lot of work, but you probably could. After all, you know the crucial fact that despite their disagreements, all your copies go back to a single original. Even without the original page in front of you, you'd be able to compare your copies to each other, figure out where the mistakes took place, and work out what the original text must have said.

The level of agreement and accuracy among these manuscripts is nothing less than astonishing

That, essentially, is what Bible scholars have to do with the manuscripts of the Old Testament: organize them, compare them with each other, figure out where and how the mistakes were made, and – where they disagree – determine what the original text must have been. In one sense their task is much more difficult than yours: they have many thousands of manuscripts, from a wide variety of places, written in a foreign language over a long period of time. Yet in another sense their task is much easier. You see, if a teacher tells her class to copy a dictionary page, there is not a great deal of motivation for the students to do a careful job: it's boring work, and that dictionary page is not precious to them, and if they don't like the teacher they might make a mess of it on purpose. For Jews and Christians, on the other hand, the scrolls of the Old Testament contained the very oracles of holy God, so they had plenty of motivation to copy it as carefully as they possibly could, out of reverence for the Lord and his Word. They also took elaborate precautions to prevent errors from creeping into the text.

These precautions are especially evident in the Masoretic Hebrew manuscripts of the Middle Ages. These manuscripts are pointed with vowel markings and punctuation symbols to ensure that the Hebrew words were read correctly. They also have notes in the margins which say things like: "This word only occurs three times." Scribes respected the text so much that they refused to change it: where they suspected that a mistake had taken place, they noted their opinion in the margin but left the text as it was. At the end of each book the scribe would write a postscript recording the number of words, the number of verses, and the middle word and middle verse of the book. Notes of this kind functioned as a form of quality control and testify to the meticulous care with which the scribes did their work.

Scribes were highly trained professionals with vast portions of Scripture committed to memory. The writings of the rabbis are filled with intense debates about very fine details of the text. If a manuscript was found to contain too many mistakes it would be taken out of circulation. In short, the level of agreement and accuracy among these manuscripts is nothing less than astonishing. It was this legacy that the Reformed churches inherited during the time of the Reformation when they set aside the Latin Vulgate in favour of the Hebrew text of the Old Testament.

It has been recovered. . .

During the Reformation, debates on the doctrines of Scripture often ran stuck because of differences in the text. Especially two factors made it possible for scholars to study those differences and to determine what the text originally said. The first was the invention of the printing press. Publishing firms could print Bibles with multiple versions of the Old Testament side by side on the same page. Hebrew manuscripts were no longer the private possession of Jewish communities but became widely available to Christian theologians who made it a priority to learn the languages of the Bible. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries scholars such as Charles Houbigant, Benjamin Kennicott, and Giovanni de Rossi collected and compared as many Hebrew manuscripts as they could and published books that made the different readings available to Bible scholars all over the world. Hebrew Bibles were published with variant readings printed in the footnotes.

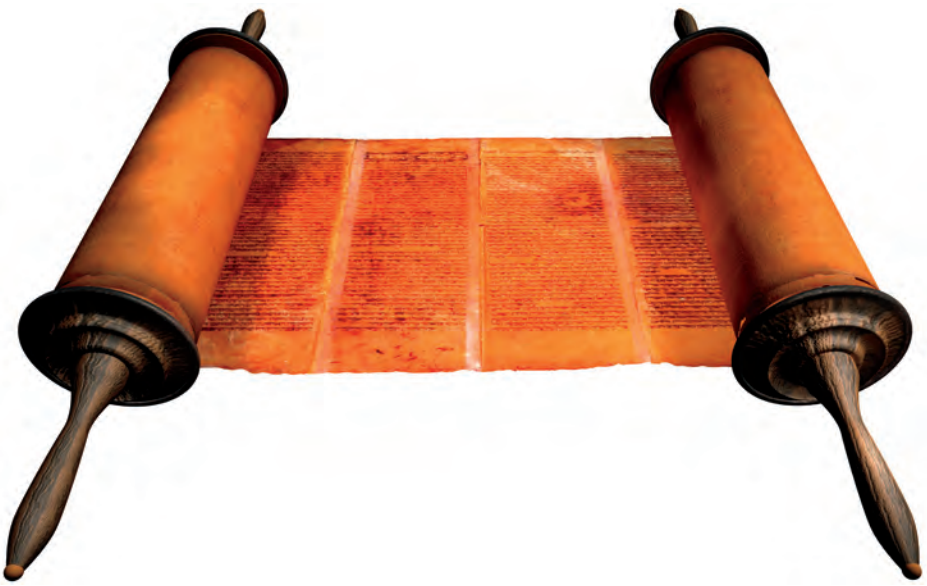
During the nineteenth century, there was a growing distrust that the original text of Scripture could actually be found among the surviving manuscripts. For one thing, scholars came to believe that the stable text of the Masoretic tradition was quite late and that the older texts were actually much more fluid. It became fashionable for scholars to propose "corrections" to the Hebrew text without any support from the manuscripts. For another, they began to believe that many Old Testament books developed over a long period of time and went through many stages of revision, and that it would therefore be impossible to recover the original version of these books from the surviving copies. In this context, a second factor played a major role, namely the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in the mid-twentieth century.

These scrolls, which contain parts of nearly all of the books of the Old Testament, were about 1000 years older than the oldest manuscripts of the Masoretes. Yet scholars found to their surprise that the text of many of these scrolls was very much the same as the Masoretic text, which proved that the text of the Old Testament was stable already much earlier than they had thought. Thus the Dead Sea Scrolls confirm the precision of the scribes' work and testify to God's care for his church.

In practical terms, it means that newer translations of the Bible such as the NIV and ESV contain far fewer speculative "corrections" than do older translations such as the RSV. Much progress has been made in determining what the text originally said, and teams of scholars continue to publish the results of their studies. These will eventually find their way into new translations of the Bible.

. . .For the most part

To be sure, not all of the problems have been solved. In some cases it is currently impossible to judge which reading of the text was original. Hence there are footnotes and there are disagreements among the translations. Thankfully, these differences rarely affect the overall meaning of a passage and even more seldom do they affect its message or the doctrines of Scripture. From that perspective, the problems and difficulties that remain make studying the text of the Old Testament fun and exciting. If you'd like to learn more, why not study it for yourself? Come on down to our Seminary, and sit in on a class or two. Or better yet, enroll in our program, enter the ministry, and spend a lifetime uncovering the nuggets of God's Word. C



The Israel Museum's Dead Sea Scrolls Digital Project allows internet users the opportunity to examine some of the Dead Sea Scrolls in fine detail.
The Great Isaiah Scroll – containing the entire book of Isaiah – can be read in parallel with an English translation. The scrolls can be viewed at dss.collections.imj.orig.il

Marc Jagt

The Bible: Reliable History or Religious Hoax?

Rev. Marc Jagt is minister of the Canadian Reformed Church at Taber, Alberta
mjagt@telus.net

"It's like a fairy tale," he said. My student was actually trying to be respectful. "It probably didn't actually happen," he continued. "But it's got some very good lessons about life."

I was teaching in a public high school. But I might as well have been in a German university 200 years ago. Over the last centuries, faith in the Bible as reliable history has evaporated. Prominent atheists like Richard Dawkins tell us that we Christians should be listening to our (liberal) theologians who have learned to not read the Bible so literally. For Dawkins, the average Christian is still in the Stone Age.

Questioning times

What do the ancient stones tell us? Does archaeology corroborate biblical events? Can we read the historical parts of the Bible the same way we read a history textbook?

These questions are raised close to home. A recent issue of *The Banner*, the church magazine of the Christian Reformed Church, contained an article questioning the historicity of Adam and Eve.[1] And this clearly had a domino effect. The author himself noted that if Adam and Eve are not real historical people, "the entire doctrine of original sin falls by the wayside." He suggested that "theologians need to consider whether our understanding of Jesus also needs to be revised."

Can we trust the historical parts of Scripture? This is a critical question to ask and to answer.

Honest defenders needed

First, a word of caution. Zeal to "prove" the truthfulness of Scripture has produced a number of Indiana Jones. I've spied DVDs, for instance, from a certain Ron Wyatt in church libraries. Do *not* give these to your Muslim neighbour. Mr. Wyatt was nothing but a shyster. There are a surprising number of forgeries, too, on the antiquities market. This is big business. In the last years, we've seen two big frauds. One is the James ossuary – a bone-box that has inscribed on it "the brother of Jesus." When the Israeli authorities busted Oded Golan's apartment, they found a sophisticated set up with some new forgeries in progress. (Note: Mr. Golan was acquitted of his role in the James ossuary and some still insist it is genuine.) Also, in 2012 a Harvard professor, Karen King, unveiled a little piece of papyrus that supposedly mentioned the Lord Jesus had a wife. But this too was revealed to be a fake.

Read the Bible carefully

A second word of caution. We also need to be clear about what the Word of God actually states. For instance, it's fashionable among academics today to deny the historicity of the conquest of Canaan under Joshua. Archaeologically speaking, we don't see evidence of an influx of huge amount of people or widespread cultural change. But if you read the book of Joshua carefully, as Kenneth Kitchen points out, you'll see the assumptions are wrong.[2] The Israelites don't rush into Canaan all at once, destroying everything and everyone in sight. Their numbers may not have been as high as once thought, either.

This begs the question, then, of just what you would actually expect to dig up on a dig.

The Garden of Eden

Or take the biblical description of the Garden of Eden. We are given the names of four rivers that originate (or converge) close to Eden. This has given more than a few people the thrill of the hunt. We still have two rivers called the Tigris and the Euphrates. But are these the same rivers of Eden? Names have a wonderful way of being recycled. Even if they are, who knows how the region has changed, especially if we factor in a world-wide flood? We need to be cautious in our interpretation of the biblical data.

But notice this about Scripture's description of the Garden of Eden: It reads much like a description you might find in a modern tour book of *an actual place*. We're told, for instance, that "the Pishon winds through the land of Havilah, where there is gold. The gold of that land is good. Aromatic resin and onyx are also there" (Gen 2:11-12). This was not written by Aesop or the Brothers Grimm. Eden was a part of this world, Eden is at the beginning history – your history and my history, too.

Jericho's walls

Archaeology gives us concurring evidence for many biblical accounts. But it has its challenges as well. Take Jericho, for instance.

Archaeology reveals that Jericho was certainly destroyed in the mid-second century B.C. The city was burned. Grain was still left in jars – so we know further that this was not a long protracted siege. In fact, there is evidence for an elaborate double wall around the city that violently crumbled. As Joshua 6 says, the walls of Jericho did come tumbling down. No one doubts this.

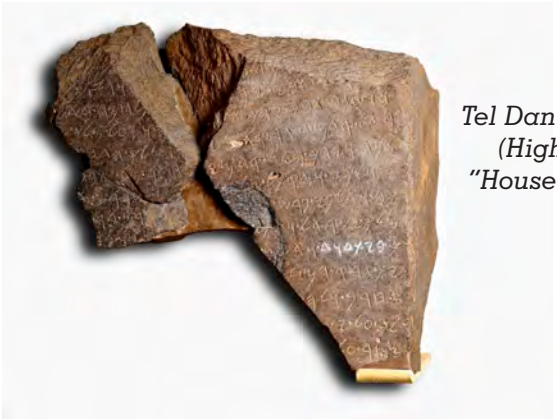
Archaeological "facts"

But there is considerable debate over whether this actually happened in Joshua's day. Early excavation in the 1930s under John Garstang dated this to around 1400 B.C. – which fits with traditional biblical chronology. The Exodus from Egypt happened around 1450 B.C. The Israelites then wandered in the wilderness for forty years – so Jericho's destruction around 1400 B.C. fits just right.

But a later excavation had different conclusions. Kathleen Kenyon, who worked on Jericho's dig a few decades later, insisted that the city was destroyed in 1550 B.C. In fact, she believed it was unoccupied in 1400 B.C. The skeptics' theory would then go like this: Jericho actually fell in 1550 B.C. due to an earthquake. Later on the Israelites made up the story we have in Joshua – to give credit to their heroes (perhaps fictional) and to use this to promote their own agenda.

But how do archaeologists make such a firm conclusion about the date? Among other things, Kenyon could not find evidence in Jericho for a certain kind of Cypriot pottery which was made after 1500 B.C. This pottery was a favourite choice among the Canaanites. You need to know, as well, that in archaeology pottery trends are the chronological spine.

But Dr. Bryant Wood has a different conclusion. He has spent decades studying the indigenous pottery in Canaan. He has found evidence for local Late Bronze



Tel Dan inscription (Highlighted: "House of David")

Age I pottery in Jericho – which fits the biblical date. He believes Kenyon excavated in a poor area of the city - where you would not really expect to find the fancy Cypriot pottery. And he suggests that some shards from the first dig in the 1930s, which were not given due attention, are actually Kenyon's missing pieces.[3]

In short, Kenyon's date of 1550 B.C. for Jericho's destruction looks like it needs to come tumbling down.

The Hittites

The Old Testament has been corroborated numerous times. For the longest time, outside of Scripture, we had no evidence at all for the existence of the Hittites. This seemed surprising – as the Hittites go way back and play a large role in the ancient biblical world. Finally, in the early twentieth century, their capital city of Boğazköy was discovered in Turkey, along with thousands of cuneiform tablets.

King David a King Arthur?

The biblical King David is often seen as little more than an Israelite King Arthur. Our excavations don't uncover monuments bearing his name or regaling his deeds. This begs the question, however, of just what we should expect. The Pharaohs of Egypt certainly scratch their names and victories everywhere (sometimes with exaggeration, as well.) But would David have done this? It's not unreasonable to say that King David was different kind of leader than an Egyptian pharaoh.

In 1993 archaeologists uncovered a stele (stone marker) at the ruins of the ancient town of Dan (Tel Dan). It mentions the "House of David." Those insisting on denying the existence of David have resorted to all sorts of theories. Some maintain this is just the name of a town – Beth-David, like Bethlehem or Beth-shan ("beth" means "house"). But the inscription speaks about the King of Israel and the King of the House of David – clearly two

Inscription with the term "politarchs" – Thessolonica

people. The names of the kings are not preserved in their entirety – but we can make out they end in both "-ram" and "-yahu." Even your first-grader can see the affinity with 2 Kings 8:29. There we read that Hazael of Damascus went to war against Joram, King of Israel, and Ahaziah (Hebrew - Ahazyahu). And Hazael was the victor - just the thing to be proclaimed at the border town of Dan.

Political propaganda?

There is this pernicious theory amongst some that the Bible is a late composition, written to legitimize those then in power. "History is written by the victors," we say. This kind of approach has also gained traction in "biblical studies." Some assert the Bible was supposedly written centuries after the "events" it describes for political purposes.

But time and time again archaeology uncovers details that no one from later times would ever have known. The city of Gezer, for instance, was clearly fortified in the tenth century B.C. We find similar fortifications at other places, as well. Shortly after this fortification, on the basis of pottery again, the city was destroyed. This is exactly what Scripture tells us in 1 Kings 9:17: King Solomon fortified the city of Gezer (and other places). A few decades later, "the fortified cities of Judah" were also destroyed by Pharaoh Shishak under Rehoboam (2 Chron 12:4). So there is both evidence for Solomonic glory and also decline. To insist that an author 600 years later invented these "legends" with all their details takes a foolish leap of faith.[4]

Abraham's camels

Sometimes it is alleged that the Bible books show various anachronisms and contradictions, which apparently we, high up on our twenty-first century perch can see far more clearly than those in the past. This would be the tell-tale sign that these books are late compositions – just like finding a reference to a "pc" or "iPhone" in something supposedly from Shakespeare's time. Abraham had camels, but scholars like W. F. Albright, who admittedly did argue for the truthfulness of the broad outline of Scripture, insisted that camels weren't domesticated until much, much later. But how can we be sure of that – unless we've made some prior assumptions not to believe the biblical data? If our yardstick is merely our current "knowledge," we will only measure accordingly.

In fact, there is plenty of evidence that camels, though not common, were in domestic use from early times. We've found a rock painting near Aswan (Egypt) of a man pulling a camel on a rope. It's dated to 2330-2150 B.C., well before Abraham's time.

Finds supporting OT figures

We could make quite a list of interesting finds related to the Old Testament. Seals impressions (called "bullae") from various figures – like King Hezekiah, Shebna (likely the Shebna of Isaiah 22:15), the stone of Mesha king of Moab (which mentions Omri, too), the stele of Pharaoh Merneptah, the first mention of Israel outside of the Bible. There is pottery inscribed "belonging to the king" found in many places, but hardly ever in northern Israel. Just the sort of thing you would expect to find if there were two kingdoms in Israel, often at war.[5] There is no reason to be skeptical about the biblical data.

Dr. Luke: a skilled historian

When we look at New Testament times, we have a fuller picture of the surrounding world. Yet, the same skepticism often exists towards the biblical account.

Despite Luke telling us that he intended to "carefully investigate" and write an "orderly account" (Luke 1:3), some scholars insisted he is still unreliable.

In Acts 17, for instance, Luke calls the rulers of the city of Thessalonica "politarchs." At first, this term was seen by some merely to be Luke's invention. But in 1835 an arch in Thessalonica was discovered with this particular term. Luke writes in detail about hundreds of individuals

Bullae (seal impression of Hezekiah)

and places – giving the skeptics plenty of opportunity to find him wrong. But that doesn't happen.

The reference in Luke 2:2 about the census under Quirinius is often given as example of Lucan error. Quirinius wasn't governor until later, A.D. 6-7 – this would be perhaps a decade too late. But, as Darrell L. Bock points out, Quirinius had a role in the Roman government well before A.D. 6 and this may be Luke's referent.[6] Scholars specializing in the ancient world, like A.N. Sherwin-White, have concluded that Luke was an extremely accurate historian.

Still more

Christian apologists in the second century, defending their faith, can point to Roman records. The church father Tertullian writes to Roman officials confident that records of the census in Luke 1 still exists. Sure – we don't have those records anymore – but that Christians could refer to them shows they had no doubt about the historicity of Jesus of Nazareth and the witness about him.

In Romans 16, Paul mentions a certain Erastus, director of public works, who sends his greetings. Paul writes from Corinth. You might expect if you were the director of public works your name would be inscribed somewhere. In 1929 a piece of stone commemorating an Erastus was found in Corinth. It's quite likely the same man.

Here are some other finds: we have an inscription that mentions Pontius Pilate and the ossuary (bone box) of Caiaphus the high priest (even his existence was previously doubted). We've found numerous spells and charms from Ephesus (Google "Ephesia Grammata" and read Acts 19).[7] The list could go on and on.

There's no reason to think Scripture is just a fairy tale, with only a moral to the story.

History from Heaven's viewpoint

Let me conclude with a few remarks. It's fascinating that at times we see a kind of reverse situation. There may be considerable archaeological data for a particular historical figure or event – but very little written about it in the biblical text. For example, archaeologists tell us that Omri was one of the most powerful kings of Israel. Over a hundred years later the Assyrian king Tilglath Pileser III calls Israel the "land of Omri." Wikipedia would have given him several pages of press. But the Word of God only gives 9 verses to Omri (1 Kgs 16:21-28). That reminds us the Bible is not our kind of history, either. It certainly is history from a certain vantage point – a heavenly one.[8]

Pontius Pilate inscription (Caesarea)

Second, we can illustrate the reliability of Scripture – and that it is this is not a leap of irrational faith to believe that "every Word of God is flawless" (Prov 30:5). Historical details, sometimes doubted by "experts" for years, continue to show themselves to be accurate. Nothing Scripture has recorded has ever proven to be false.

However, the Word of God gives us meaning to particular events in history that no scientific discipline can ever verify (or disprove). Jesus Christ not only dies – the Word tells us he dies for our sin, in our place, to rescue and redeem. No investigation into history can ever reveal that. The Word of God is more than mere history – it is "his story."

Third, we ought to remember Christ's own injunction in Luke 16:31, "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead." Humble faith in the Word is both the starting and end point. It is foolish to proceed from or rest on anything else.

As one of my high school teachers liked to say, "Give your questioning friend Christ's words in John 7:17, 'Anyone who chooses to do the will of God will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.'"

(Endnotes)

[1] Edwin Walhout, "Tomorrow's Theology" *The Banner,* June 2013, 19-21. Or see http://www.thebanner.org/features/2013/05/tomorrow-s-theology.

[2] K.A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, Eerdmans, 2003: 160-162.

[3] http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2008/05/Did-the-Israelites-Conquer-Jericho-A-New-Look-at-the-Archaeological-Evidence.aspx

[4] W.G. Dever, *What did the Biblical Writers Know & When Did They Know It?*, Eerdmans, 2001: 131-138.

[5] Dever, 130.

[6] Bock, Baker *Exegetical Commentary On The New Testament,* Luke 1:1-9:50. BakerBooks, 1999: 203.

[7] F.F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* Eerdmans, 1994: 89.

[8] http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2005/10/10/Omri-King-of-Israel.aspx.

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Dirk Poppe

The Apocrypha are not Canonical

Rev. Dirk Poppe is minister of the Canadian Reformed Church at Coaldale, Alberta
dapoppe@telus.net

Intriguing

Have you ever wondered about the Apocrypha? Article 6 of the Belgic Confession introduces these books to us and so we usually first have contact with them in our senior year of catechism. Some of the titles are fascinating. One is called "The Song of the Three Young Men in the Furnace," referring to Daniel's three friends. Another one is called "Bel and the Dragon." What young person isn't interested in reading a story about a dragon? Still another is called "The Prayer of Manasseh" and recounts what King Manasseh prayed after he was humbled by God.

If you read through the Apocrypha, you find that there is a collection (depending on how they are being counted) of fourteen books in total, namely, 3 and 4 Esdras, Tobit, Judith, Wisdom (of Jesus son of Sirach), Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, additions to Esther, the Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men in the Furnace, Susannah, Bel and the Dragon, the Prayer of Manasseh, and 1 and 2 Macccabees. They are all set in Old Testament times and some make references to Old Testament figures. Some of these books give us additional history about the Jews that we don't find in the Bible. Others seek to flesh out and give more background to biblical stories and still others seek to give words of wisdom.

Are they true?

These are all interesting books. But when you read them over, you are left with the question: are they true? Did Manasseh really say these things? Can we accept the proverbs contained in Wisdom in the same way as we accept the book of Proverbs? Is the history contained in First Esdras an accurate portrayal of what really happened? Really the question is: Are these books the inspired Word of God which we should accept as the Holy Scriptures or not?

Historical background

In order to answer that question, it would be important for us to consider the background of the Apocrypha. Where did they come from? The name Apocrypha is a Greek word meaning "things hidden." Originally this word was used to describe books which were meant only for a limited number of people because of their mysterious, magical nature. But over the course of a few centuries, many of the church fathers (e.g. Irenaeus, Tertullian, and later Athanasius and Jerome) used the word "Apocrypha" to refer to books that contain things that are questionable, and are therefore deliberately excluded from the canon.

Augustine went further and explained the word "Apocrypha" to mean "of hidden origin or authorship." By the time of the Reformation, all of these meanings were adopted so that it was understood that many of these books are of hidden origin or authorship and that they contain matters that are questionable and not necessarily in line with the rest of Scripture. As a result, the term "Apocrypha" came to mean "that which is not canonical."

Place in the early church

What authority did the Apocrypha have in the early Christian church? Although the Apocrypha were written between about 200 -70 B.C., they were not written in Hebrew like almost all of the Old Testament.[1] In his providence and by the power of his Holy Spirit, the LORD led his people in the Old Testament to recognize that the Bible contained the law, the prophets, and the writings. Therefore they excluded the Apocrypha from Scripture. No Jew (e.g. the famous historian Josephus who lived during early New Testament times) ever included the Apocrypha in the Bible.

Later, however, a few of the church fathers, (e.g. Clement of Alexandria) accepted the authority of a few books of the Apocrypha and recognized them as fully canonical. Furthermore, in a few ancient manuscripts, the Apocrypha were included with the rest of Scripture. But these were exceptions, rather than the norm. When once again after the ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ, the LORD led his church in his providence to recognize which books were to be included in the Bible, they did not include the Apocrypha.

Furthermore, during the course of the first four centuries AD, most of the church fathers also excluded the Apocrypha from the Scriptures. When Jerome translated

the Bible into Latin (called the Vulgate) he did so by going back to the Hebrew Old Testament, which did not contain the Apocrypha. Even though he resisted their inclusion, he was overruled, so that the Apocrypha was included in the Vulgate. Their authority was also increasingly accepted in the church over the course of the centuries.

Reformation's view of Apocrypha

When the Reformers set about translating the Bible into their own languages, they went back to the original Hebrew (for the OT) and Greek (for the NT) as preserved in the manuscripts. Since the Apocrypha were not written in Hebrew, they were immediately suspect. Their hidden origin and sometimes fanciful content also caused the Reformers to question their validity. As a result, they were either gathered together and placed separately between the Old and New Testament, or they were excluded altogether.

It was made clear that the Apocrypha were not part of God's Word. For example, the introduction to the Apocrypha in Luther's Bible (1534) reads, "Apocrypha, that is books which are not to be esteemed like the Holy Scriptures, and yet which are useful and good to read." This sentiment has carried on since then and is also summarized in the Belgic Confession, Article 6,

> We distinguish these holy books [the canonical] from the apocryphal. . . The church may read and take instruction from these so far as they agree with the canonical books. They are, however, far from having such power and authority that we may confirm from their testimony any point of faith or of the Christian religion; much less may they be used to detract from the authority of the holy books.

Why are they not God's Word?

So why don't we accept them as God's holy Word? Beyond what's been said already, there are several more reasons why the Apocrypha are not included in the Bible. Although the New Testament either quotes or alludes to almost every book in the Old Testament as Scripture, it never refers to any passages in the Apocrypha in the same manner, that is, as being God's Word. We do not read in the Scriptures of our Lord Jesus or one of the apostles using the phrase "it is written" when referring to an Apocryphal book.

Apocryphal teachings

The main reason they have never been accepted as Scripture is because the Apocrypha contain teachings that directly oppose the Scriptures. For example, the Bible is clear that when a person dies they either go to heaven to be with Christ or they are sent away from him. In contrast, the Apocrypha teach the doctrine of purgatory, that is, that there is a place of purging between heaven and hell, to which a person goes for a period of time to be cleansed of sin before they can enter heaven. This comes out in 2 Maccabees 12:43-45, where it says, "Two thousand drachmas of silver were sent to Jerusalem for a sin offering. . . Therefore he made atonement for the dead, so that they might be delivered from their sin."

Another doctrine that is upheld in the Apocrypha is that we can be saved by doing good works. In Ecclesiasticus 3:30 it says, "As water quenches a blazing fire, so almsgiving atones for sin." Similarly in Tobit 12:8-9, it says, "Better give alms than hoard up gold. Almsgiving preserves from death and wipes out every sin." Once again this is in direct conflict with what God's Word teaches us. The Lord is clear that we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ and that our good works cannot pay for our sins or earn salvation for us. Clearly in these places, as in numerous other places, the Apocrypha are teaching doctrines that are contrary to Scripture.

Rome's approval

You may recognize that these teachings have been upheld by the Roman Catholic Church. Rome teaches that people enter purgatory after they die and remain there until their sins are atoned for. This is why people have bought indulgences, or continue to offer prayers for the dead or light a candle on behalf of a dead relative. Similarly, the Roman Catholic Church teaches us that good works are necessary for salvation. It should come as no surprise then that the Roman Catholic Church took a different view of the Apocrypha than the Reformers. Rather than distancing themselves from the Apocrypha, they recognized them as canonical at the council of Trent (1545-1563) and can be found in every Roman Catholic Bible. Part of the motivation for doing so is because the Apocrypha defend beliefs and practices of the Roman Catholic Church which were being challenged by the Reformation.

Benefit today

All of this is not to say that the Apocrypha hold no benefit for us. One of the real blessings that comes out of reading them is that some of them provide us with reliable information. For example, the book of 1 Maccabees is a historical account of Jewish history from 175 to 135 B.C. which is regarded as a source of accurate information by many scholars. Another benefit of the Apocrypha is that they give us a window into Jewish thought in the centuries between the testaments. When you read through the Apocrypha you get a real flavour of the religious convictions of the Jews during this time period. This can be very helpful for us in understanding the New Testament, for the Apocrypha give us information about many of the wrong teachings that the Lord Jesus and the Apostles encountered and addressed.

Conclusion

So if you are intrigued by these books and wish to read them one day, hopefully by now you will be able to appreciate the balanced approach taken by the Belgic Confession. In the first place, we confess, "The church may read and take instruction from these so far as they agree with the canonical books." There can be some benefit in reading them. But at the same time, we confess that they are not God's Word and therefore they don't have authority nor may they ever detract from the inspired 66 books. "They are, however, far from having such power and authority that we may confirm from their testimony any point of faith or of the Christian religion; much less may they be used to detract from the canonical books."

[1] Several chapters in the books of Ezra and Daniel are written in Aramaic but the rest of each is written in Hebrew. Very likely their use of Aramaic relates to their high positions in the throne rooms of Gentile kingdoms where Aramaic was one of the regularly-used official languages.

Gerhard H. Visscher

How Reliable is the New Testament?

Dr. Gerhard H. Visscher is the principal and professor of New Testament at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary in Hamilton, Ontario
gerhard.visscher@canrc.org

How do we know that the book in our hands that we call the Bible is really the Word of God, an accurate reflection of what God intended to say to his people? This is a significant question that can arise for any observant reader of the New Testament, especially since the pages of the NT often have footnotes that refer to other ancient versions or manuscripts, or variant readings. The Bible did not drop out of the sky, all complete; like any other ancient book, it was passed on from human authors through human scribes to human messengers and later through human publishers. It is often correctly asserted that "we don't have the original manuscripts on which the authors actually first wrote, the so-called *autographa*." If these things are so, how sure indeed can we be about the accuracy of what we do have?

The answer? Very sure. Fully confident.

Quantity of manuscripts

While we might wish for one single perfect copy of Scripture falling out of the sky, what we actually have received is no less astounding. Whereas today we have no more than about twenty ancient copies of famous writers such as Plato, Aristotle, or Tacitus, there are about 5700 manuscripts of the New Testament, about 20,000 manuscripts from other early translations (Latin, Coptic, Syriac, etc), and over a million quotations from early church fathers. As one respected NT scholar wrote: "In comparison with the average ancient Greek author, the NT copies are well over a thousand times more plentiful. To put this another way, if the average-sized MS were two and a half inches thick, all of the copies of the average Greek author would stack up four feet high, while the copies of the NT would stack up over a *mile* high. This is. . . an embarrassment of riches."[1] The challenge for New Testament scholars is not that they do not have enough evidence, but they have too much and need to wade through all this material to make the best choices in those instances where there is any dispute. Meanwhile though, there is no doubt that in this vast amount of material the original reading can be found in each instance.

Quality of manuscripts

Also the quality of the manuscripts of the NT is considerably better than that of any other ancient manuscript. We know beyond a doubt what the NT says in 99.5% of the text. The variants in the other .5% have appeared because of the challenges before the early scribes, challenges either in hearing what a lead scribe would say, in reading the writing of another, or judgement about comments made in the margins of a manuscript. The largest number of the variants is actually due to variations in spelling and word order. In seminary, future pastors are taught the techniques that can be used to determine a preferred reading regarding this small number of variants. It is also noteworthy that there is not one single point of doctrine that rests on a manuscript problem. Again, a position of strength rather than weakness!

How sure can we be about the accuracy of what we do have?

The time span of manuscripts

Also on another front, the providence of God in providing his Word is evident. With respect to other ancient manuscripts, there is usually a time gap of about 1,000 years between the actual writing of the document and any of the copies available. With biblical manuscripts, however, we are again in a much stronger position. While most NT books were written before 70 AD, many respected scholars believe that we have papyrus manuscripts which date back already to the first half of the second century – within 100 years of the first writing! The earliest, Papyrus 52 (or P^{52}) is probably to be dated as early as 100-150 A.D.[2] There are about fifteen significant manuscripts that should be dated in the second century.[3] This also means, by the way, that whereas in the past many have suggested that priority ought to be given to the Majority text behind, e.g., the NKJV, this Majority text should really be seen as of historical interest in the textual tradition, but not of decisive value in determining the original reading because it does not really surface until the fourth century.[4]

P^{52} - possibly the earliest NT manuscript (ca. 110-125), containing John 18:31-34, 37-38

The process

Another aspect that encourages us to acknowledge the authority of Scripture is received from a greater awareness of the process. Many would suggest that it was only after several subsequent centuries that people began to realize that these twenty-seven books made up a New Testament alongside of an Old Testament. The evidence, again, lies elsewhere. Luke appears to be very aware that he is writing Scripture (1:2). Peter places the writings of Paul on par with that of the Old Testament (2 Pet 3:16). Paul at one point (1 Tim 5:18) references what "Scripture says" and then quotes from Deuteronomy 25:4 and from Luke 10:7. Paul and others write about their own writings as writings that have the authority of Scripture (1 Thess 5: 27; 2 Cor 10:9, Rev 1:3). At an early point already, the NT community was reading and accepting these writings as divinely authored Scripture; this is confirmed, for example, by Justin Martyr who writes in the middle of the second century and places the apostles in one line with the prophets: "And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things" (1 Apol 67.3). No less intriguing in all of this is the fact that even the scribes who were occupied with copying the manuscripts of gospels and letters were engaged in organized, sacred activity as they developed a significant number of capitalized abbreviations especially for well-known divine names (called "Nomina Sacra").[5]

God so directed all things that we receive his infallible Word today

Vaticanus – one of the most oustanding manuscripts, kept today in the Vatican, contains most of the Old and New Testaments

Providence and inspiration

When one adds to all these factors the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and the awareness that the providence of God also encompasses the transmission of Scripture, one does not need to doubt that what we have in our hands today is the Word of God. Yes, God used fallible human beings; but he so directed all things that we receive his infallible Word today. Paul makes the claim that "all" or "every" Scripture "is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness. . ." (2 Tim 3:16). And when Peter reflects on what he has received from the Lord Jesus, he boldly says, "We did not follow cleverly invented stories. . . 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 Pet 1:21). The infinite God has written his church a love letter; those who love him in return can and will read and cherish it.

(Endnotes)

[1] Daniel B. Wallace, "Laying a Foundation: New Testament Textual Criticism," *Interpreting the New Testament Text: introduction to the Art and Science of Exegesis*. Edited by D.L. Bock and B. M. Fanning. (Crossway Books, 2006), 43.

[2] See Wallace, p. 39 and also chapter three of Philip Comfort, *Encountering the Manuscripts: An Introduction to New Testament Paleography and Textual Criticism* (Broadman & Holman, 2005). The latter is a standard textbook for NT Text Criticism at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary; for the reader with interest in this area, it is an excellent introduction regarding the process of dating, copying, and circulating in the early Christian community.

[3] Wallace, p. 39. This also means, by the way, that whereas in recent decades many have suggested that priority ought to be given to the Majority text behind the NKJV, this Majority text should really be seen as of historical interest in the textual tradition, but not of decisive value in determining the original reading.

[4] See Daniel B. Wallace, "The Majority Text Theory: History, Methods, and Critique," *The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research*. Edited by Bart D. Ehrman and Michael W. Holmes. (Eerdmans, 1995) 297-320.

[5] See chapter four of P. Comfort's text referenced above for a fascinating discussion of this practice.

Ryan Kampen

Rev. Ryan Kampen is minister of the Emmanuel American Reformed Church at Denver, Colorado
rjkampen@gmail.com

Should There Be Only Twenty-Seven New Testament Books?

> *It is time for a new New Testament.*
> *Over the past century, numerous lost scriptures have been discovered, authenticated, translated, debated, celebrated. Many of these documents were as important to shaping early-Christian communities and beliefs as what we have come to call the New Testament; these were not the work of shunned sects or rebel apostles, not alternative histories or doctrines, but part of the vibrant conversations that sparked the rise of Christianity. Yet these scriptures are rarely read in contemporary churches; they are discussed nearly only by scholars or within a context only of gnostic gospels. Why should these books be set aside? Why should they continue to be lost to most of us? And don't we have a great deal to gain by placing them back into contact with the twenty-seven books of the traditional New Testament—by hearing, finally, the full range of voices that formed the early chorus of Christians?*

Such provocative words are found on the inside flap of a book published March 5, 2013, authored by Hal Taussig, entitled, *A New New Testament: A Bible for the 21st Century* Combining Traditional and Newly Discovered Texts (New York: Houghton Mifflin). And no, when you read that title you are not "seeing double," nor have you stumbled upon a grammatical blunder. The title, rather, is a clever way of drawing your attention to what is, in fact, an age-long conversation in the church, one that began with the idea of "pseudepigrapha," shortly after the books of the New Testament were inspired.

Knowing our terms

The early church used the word "pseudepigrapha" (from the Greek *pseudepigraphos*, "false [*pseudo*] superscription [*epigraphos*]") when referring to religious works that were falsely attributed to an apostle of Jesus Christ. You may come across modern literature that, while ultimately speaking of pseudepigrapha, uses different words. You will frequently find that the word "pseudepigraphy" is used interchangeably with the word "pseudonymity" ("under a false name").

We are familiar with pseudonyms, or "pen names:" Mark Twain was actually Samuel Langhorne Clemens; George Orwell was really Eric Blair. These modern authors had their reasons for using pen names, just as the ancients did, as we will see. You will also encounter terms such as "New Testament Apocrypha," or even "New Testament Pseudepigrapha." Such titles are rather unappealing, since they imply that the writings to which they refer are in effect part of the New Testament itself, when in fact they were all written *after* the twenty-seven books of the New Testament, with some even dating from the Middle Ages.

What is more, we need to make a distinction between apocryphal and pseudepigraphical works. The matter of *apocrypha* is concerned primarily with canonicity (were such books considered Scripture?); the matter of *pseudepigrapha* is concerned chiefly with authenticity (were such books written by an apostle of the Lord?), and only then with canonicity.[1] So let's follow the vocabulary used by the early church and busy ourselves with the term "pseudepigrapha."

Motives for pseudepigrapha

The past century and a half have witnessed the rediscovery of pseudepigrapha that have prompted new questions about which books should be included in the canon of Scripture. So let's take a few moments to see how exactly these writings came about in the first place.

Historians have identified a legion of motives. Here are some of the more prominent ones:[2]

1. *For financial gain*. The great library of Alexandria, for example, had a great demand for copies of the writings of famous authors, and monetary rewards were therefore offered to those who provided a copy of an author's writings.

2. *Out of malice*. A writer may have wanted to malign an enemy, so he would publish, under the name of his rival, nasty things about cities or well-known individuals and have such writings then disseminated to such places or people.
3. *To bolster the credibility* of one's own teaching or doctrine. To do so, a pseudepigrapher would invoke the name of an important figure in history, often an apostle.
4. *Out of modesty,* real or alleged. This strange motive, of considering your writings of such a calibre that they should be attributed to a biblical writer, flows into the next.
5. *To be read more widely.*
6. *To be considered filled with the Spirit*. Some authors believed they had been filled with the Holy Spirit to carry out this task.

There were many such writings that began to appear in the Christian church in the early days of the second century. These writings were representative of every type of genre in the New Testament: Gospels (e.g., *Gospel of Peter*); Acts (e.g., *Acts of John*); Epistles claiming to be written by Paul (e.g., *Epistle to the Laodiceans*); and Apocalypses (e.g., *Second Apocalypse of James*).

Some examples

It has been estimated that there were about three hundred books of this nature. The following are some of the more well-known pseudepigraphic works:

1. *The Gospel of Thomas* (written mid-second century). This is likely the best known pseudo gospel. Some think this gospel contains authentic sayings of Jesus not found in the NT gospels. It includes stories of miracles Jesus apparently performed as a child, such as fashioning twelve sparrows from clay and making them fly, and cursing a young boy who withered like a tree. Most infamous is the last line of the gospel: "Jesus said. .. 'For every woman who makes herself male will enter the kingdom of heaven.'" Not only does it contain such absurd stories, but it also has a strong Gnostic flavour, denying the humanity of Jesus Christ.
2. *The Gospel of Peter* (mid-second century). This work is focused mainly upon the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. It contains such stories as a "giant" Jesus exiting the tomb, with a cross following him and even starting to speak! Also in this gospel there are some Gnostic tendencies, denying the humanity of Christ, with Jesus hanging on the cross while feeling no pain, and crying out, "My Power, my Power, why have you forsaken me?"

Verdict of the early church

What are we to think? What about Taussig's sentiments, that those "scriptures" not included in the New Testament ought to be integrated into the church, and into our worship? Is it not time for a new New Testament?

Not in the least! Those closest to the writings of the New Testament had a few things to say on the matter. They had a number of criteria for accepting writings as authentic, and therefore canonical, and as we go through some of these criteria, we will note where applicable how the pseudepigrapha do not fit the bill.

1. *Divine qualities:* Inspired writings bear the marks of something that is from God. Calvin wrote that Scripture is "clearly crammed with thoughts that could not be humanly conceived. Let each of the prophets be looked into: none will be found who does not far exceed human measure" (*Institutes*, 1.8.1). The inspired Scriptures speak clearly that they are from an infinitely wise, creative, and excellent Author. These Scriptures can only be recognized and discerned, then, by those in whom God resides by his Spirit (1 Cor 2:10-14). And as God is a God of unity and harmony, never contradicting himself (Titus 1:2), so it is with his Scriptures. Books such as the Gospel of Peter and the pseudonymous letter of Paul to the Laodiceans were very early on condemned as heretical, which played a significant role in determining their status as pseudepigrapha.
2. *Corporate reception:* As the Spirit has been poured out on the church, so it stands to reason that his testimony in the hearts of individual believers would materialize in a corporate recognition and reception of God's Word. That does not mean that, by default, total unity regarding the canon would be there – it wasn't. But the church throughout the ages has experienced substantive unity. The church as a community of redeemed sinners has a place in the authentication of the canon, and though the church's recognition of the canon did not happen overnight, the canonical books were being used as Scripture by the end of the second century.[3] Pseudepigrapha were being used as well, but not endorsed.
3. *Apostolic origins:* The apostles were the mouthpieces of Christ and given the task of recording his redemptive message. Early Christians, therefore, consistently rejected books known to be forged in the name of an apostle. The Apostle Paul stated in 2 Thessalonians 2:1, 2, "We ask you, brothers, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come." Interesting that this

> comes from a letter that many claim is pseudepigraphic. If the author was not Paul, then we have a forgery that condemns forgeries. But if Paul did write it, then he is condemning the practice of pseudonymity.

The matter of deception played into this, since pseudonymous authors went out of their way to convince the reader that they actually *were* apostles. This deception bears no compatibility with the inspired Word of God. [4] The Muratorian Canon (c. AD 180), which is the earliest canonical list of many of the New Testament books (twenty two of the twenty-seven), refers to the *Epistle to the Alexandrians* and the *Epistle to the Laodiceans* as "both forged in Paul's name to [further] the heresy of Marcion, and several others which cannot be received into the catholic Church" (*Mur. Can*. 64-66).

Divine qualities are obvious

At the same time, the above criteria are all connected to one another. You cannot speak of one without speaking of the others. To quote Michael Kruger,

> Divine qualities exist only because a book is produced by an inspired apostolic author. And any book that has an apostolic author, due to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, will inevitably contain divine qualities. In addition, any book with divine qualities (and apostolic origins) will impose itself on the church and, via the work of the [Spirit], be corporately received.[5]

This is in some ways an echo of Article 5 of the Belgic Confession which echoes the teaching of Scripture on its authority:

> We receive all these books, and these only, as holy and canonical, for the regulation, foundation, and confirmation of our faith. We believe without any doubt all things contained in them, *not so much because the church receives and approves them as such, but especially because the Holy Spirit witnesses in our hearts that they are from God, and also because they contain the evidence thereof in themselves;* for, even the blind are able to perceive that the things foretold in them are being fulfilled. (Emphasis added.)

The recognition of the church is an important element – the sheep hear their Shepherd's voice – but the "testimony of the Holy Spirit in our hearts that they are from God" is essential for distinguishing between authentic Scriptures and pseudepigrapha.

We have, therefore, good ground for affirming that our twenty-seven books of the New Testament belong, and that the numerous fanciful and heretical works penned later are not inspired by the Spirit.

Useful or useless?

As we imply in Article 5, pseudepigrapha cannot be used for the regulation, foundation, and confirmation of our faith. But does that mean we should disregard them altogether? Let's not toss the proverbial baby out with the bath water; there are useful things we can learn from them.

In Article 6 of the *Belgic Confession*, we make our confession about the Apocryphal books, and we can just as well think here of the pseudepigrapha: "The church may read and take instruction from these so far as they agree with the canonical books." They can provide further insights into the cultural, political, and economical world in which the New Testament Scriptures were written, and as such, present material that can flesh out our study of the teachings of our Lord Jesus and his apostles.

Of course, that comes with a *caveat*. These books contain heretical teachings that buffeted the early church. So we have to be on our guard. What the Spirit does not inspire, so far as church writings are concerned, is open to thoughts that deviate from God's Word. Taussig wrote on page 489 of his book, "[The Gospel of Mary] inspired women to think of themselves as real leaders in conventionally male-dominated situations. The Gospel of Thomas proclaims the radical availability of God inside people. . . ."[6] We have to be aware that pseudepigrapha are not only about history; they teach theology as well, *man-made* theology to be precise.

So do we need a new New Testament? No. For nearly 2000 years, it has been recognized that God's New Covenant word comes to us exclusively in these tested and proven writings. Only these twenty-seven books are inspired by the Holy Spirit, recorded by the apostles, and received by the church, for the basis, benefit, and bolstering of our faith.

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[1] D.A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2005), 337.

[2] List taken, in part from Kent D. Clarke, "The Problem of Pseudonymity in Biblical Literature and Its Implications for Canon Formation," in *The Canon Debate*, ed. Lee Martin McDonald and James A. Sanders (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 448–9; Bruce M. Metzger, "Literary Forgeries and Canonical Pseudepigrapha," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 91 (1972): 5–11.

[3] Michael J. Kruger, *Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2012), 203.

[4] Ibid., 190–1.

[5] Ibid., 115.

[6] Reference found at http://michaeljkruger.com/man-made-religion-at-its-best-review-of-a-new-new-testament-part-3/.

Marc Jagt

Every Christian's Conspiracy

Rev. Marc Jagt is minister of the Canadian Reformed Church at Taber, Alberta
mjagt@telus.net

"Teabing paused to sip his tea and then placed the cup back on the mantel. 'More than eighty gospels were considered for the New Testament, and yet only a relative few were chosen for inclusion.'"

So claims the "expert" in Dan Brown's novel, *The Da Vinci Code* (p. 231). According to the fictional Sir Leigh Teabing, the emperor Constantine "had" Jesus deified at the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. The original Jesus, supposedly, was a mere man. He even had a wife. But Constantine, it's conjectured, wanted a new god for his new empire. And he authorized a slimmed down Bible with only four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, to support this politically motivated claim. According to Brown, the "thousands" of documents that chronicled Christ's life "as a mortal man" were pushed aside in one fell swoop.

A real conspiracy

Brown's mystery thriller has been a world-wide best seller. It has sold close to 100 million copies. In 2006 it was made into a Hollywood blockbuster movie starring Tom Hanks and Sir Ian McKellen. Clearly, its subject strikes a chord with our culture.

You may not be big into conspiracy theories. Was 9/11 an inside job? Is the world's future shaped at Bilderberg conventions? But every Christian, by default, accepts the reality of a great conspiracy. Against the true God, his Christ, and his Word.

In the Heidelberg Catechism we confess that praying for God's kingdom to come means asking the Lord to "Destroy. . . every conspiracy against your holy Word" (Q/A 123). Have no doubts about it – there is a conspiracy against the Word of God. And we need to arm ourselves against it, pray for God to destroy it, for our sake and the world around us.

Old tricks

Brown's twenty-first century novel is hardly novel. It's so old-fashioned, really. It's very little different from Genesis 3, the first time the Word of God was questioned. That old dragon, the devil, hardly has a new trick.

Brown's novel is devilish in its packaging. It's a novel, then a movie. That means Dan Brown can make all sorts of wild claims without really having to prove them. If this were a high school essay, it would get an F. But a mystery thriller is so much easier to swallow.

It's also devilish in its substance. "History has never had a definitive version of [the Bible]" says Teabing (p. 231). "The Bible did not arrive by fax from heaven." It's all really not much different from the first words of the serpent in Genesis 3:1, "Did God really say. . . ?"

Pure fiction

Brown's claims have been debunked in numerous books. I have here on my shelf a little book of eighty pages by Hank Hanegraaf and Paul L. Maier. *The Da Vinci Code: Fact or Fiction?* Easy to hand out, simple to read. It exposes the dozens of outright fabrications in Brown's book.

For instance, where does Brown get the claim there were eighty gospels? This is nothing but pure fiction.

True, there are a few Gnostic "gospels," from a sect in the second and third century. The Gnostics attempted to hijack some elements of Christianity in the service of Greek philosophy and mysticism. According to them, the universe is the battleground for two gods, one good and one evil. The evil god formed the physical world and our bodies to imprison us. The Gnostic Jesus, then, is a liberator, not from sin, but from the material world.

But were these heretical Gnostic gospels ever part of Scripture? Was the state of the canon in flux until Constantine in the fourth century? There's not a shred of evidence of this.

Four and only four

In the second century, a man named Tatian made a harmony or mosaic of the gospel accounts – his *Diatesseron*. It uses our four gospels and only these four. A decade or so later, the church father Ireneaus can say that "There are four gospels and only four, neither more nor less: four like the points of the compass, four like the chief directions of the wind" (*Against Heresies*, 3.8).

A list of Bible books called the Muratorian canon, from about 180 A.D., lists only the gospels Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Our New Testament simply was not the decision of Constantine in 325.

Genesis and Esther?

But these kinds of conspiracy theories continue to gain traction, both in popular and in academic circles. Recently, the BBC produced a series called "The Bible's Buried Secrets." (Not to be confused with the NOVA series of the same name.) In it, Dr. Francesca Stavrakopoulou – who has been hailed by atheists like Richard Dawkins – puts forward "the buried secret" of Genesis. The biblical account of creation and the fall, she says, is actually about the fall of the last Jewish king (the "Adam figure"), led astray by his evil Jezebel-like wife (played by Eve). Supposedly, Genesis was written a thousand years after Moses, during the time of Esther.

Josiah's Deuteronomy

But Kenneth Kitchen ably points out this claim makes no sense. The book of Genesis reads like something written in the 2nd millennium B.C. It bears no trace of being written in the time of Esther. There are no Persian words in it, for instance, nothing like what we find in books like Daniel or Esther.[1]

This sort of hypothesis is just the latest in a long list of theories that attempt to date the biblical books to much, much later than they claim for themselves. A few hundred years ago, German scholars postulated that Deuteronomy was not *found* in King Josiah's time, in the seventh century B.C., but was actually *written* in his time, to legitimize Josiah's reforms. Why did they think this? One main reason is that Deuteronomy speaks about the king, his role and responsibility, and it speaks about a central place of worship. These things did not exist until centuries after Moses.

A huge circular argument gets invented: "We do not believe in prophecy → Deuteronomy speaks about realities like a king and a temple → Therefore, it must be a later document → And it could not have been written by Moses." If you begin with the premise the Word of God is merely the word of man then that will be your conclusion as well.

Editors needed

You'll even find a bias against Scripture on Wikipedia.

A hundred years ago or so, a man named Adolf Van Harnack put forward the idea that the canon, a fixed list of authoritative books, only arose in the church because of the influence of a heretic from the second century A.D. named Marcion. Marcion started a new cult, with a new Bible – only part of the gospel of Luke and ten of Paul's letters. No Old Testament. Von Harnack claimed that it was only because of Marcion the church developed its own canon. Wikipedia reads, "This prompted the orthodox, apostolic church to form an official canon of books that had been recognized as divinely inspired and authoritative."[2]

But what support is given for this claim? The early church didn't have to borrow the idea of a "canon" from Marcion. Every Jew at the time of Christ was well acquainted with the concept of a canon, a list of "these books and these only." Certainly, the church did respond to Marcion, defending the canon. But to say there was no official canon before him? This is not much different than Dan Brown claiming there is and never was a definitive version of Scripture.

The Word incarnate

It's all just what sinners want to hear – and you and me included, in our sinfulness. We might be skeptical of other conspiracy theories, but this one caters to that deep rooted desire in all of us to be autonomous, to do what is right in our own eyes. If you read Dan Brown's book, too, you'll discover that he has an agenda. The authoritative Word of the Sovereign Father is dismissed. And instead, Brown promotes something he calls the "sacred feminine," a spirituality without the constraints of morality. Not much different than the immoral worship of the ancient Baals and Asherahs, who also did not have a "word" to be obeyed.

But thankfully there is One who never questioned the Word of God, who lived by it faithfully, even when it demanded his death: our Lord Jesus Christ. And it is in him, the Word incarnate, that all conspiracies about the Word of God are and will be finally laid to rest.

Fear and trembling

The prophet Isaiah tells us that the Lord looks with favour on "those who are humble and contrite in spirit,

and who tremble at my word" (Isa 66:2b). The devil constantly wants to take away that blessed fear and trembling. As in the beginning, he wants to make us judges over God's Word. "Did God really say?" But Jesus Christ forms a people who know God's Word to be the Word of the Holy God, true and certain.

How do we respond to these conspiracies? We can debate and discuss. But we must also daily acknowledge the King, the King's Word and Spirit, and live submissively within his kingdom. "So rule us by your Word and Spirit," we pray in the Catechism. A Christian who clings to the Word, throughout life's troubles, makes that great deceiver quake with fear.

In Jesus Christ, God's promises are always "yes" and "amen" (2 Cor 1:20). Attacks on the Word of God are always attacks upon the goodness and glory of God. But Jesus Christ had come to lay all those questions to rest – the cross is down payment on that. And when he returns God's Word will be proved so beautifully true and good it will never be questioned again, into all eternity. Maranatha, O Word Incarnate!

(Endnotes)

[1] K.A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament,* Eerdmans, 2003: 463

[2] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marcion_of_Sinope.

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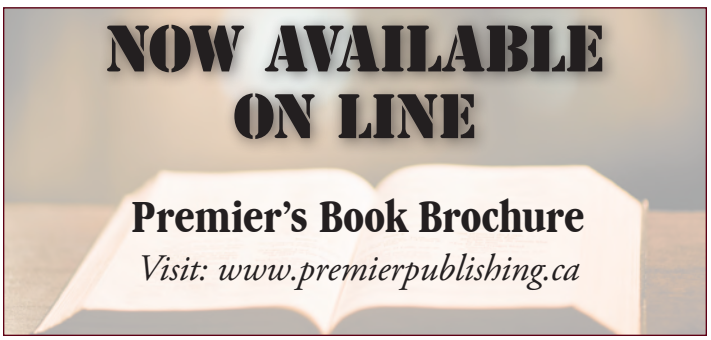

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Went to glory with her heavenly Father
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- Margaret and Albert (Heemskerk)
- Henry and Elaine
- Tony and Marcelle
- Ed and Bernadine
- Tim and Cathy
- Walter and Wilma
- Clarence and Jeanette
- Elaine and Art (Pruim)

Loving Oma of 48 grandchildren and Great Oma of 15 great-grandchildren.

Predeceased by her husband, Heinrich (Henry) Walter Togeretz and son, Walter Hendrikus-Willem, and her siblings in the Netherlands.

Born: June 21, 1931 in Vlissingen, the Netherlands.

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Many thanks to the wonderful care from all the staff at Juravinski Cancer Centre.

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Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Hebrews 11:1

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REMMELT "RON" DYKSTRA

Husband of Maritha Dykstra (nee deBoer)

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Chilliwack, BC:	Jim and Margaret Dykstra
Surrey, BC:	Richard and Rieneke Dykstra
Abbotsford, BC:	Marion and Harry deBoer

Nieces and Nephews

OBITUARIES

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We offer our sincere condolences to our sister Ardis, her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.

Yours in Christ, Board of Mission Aid Brazil

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