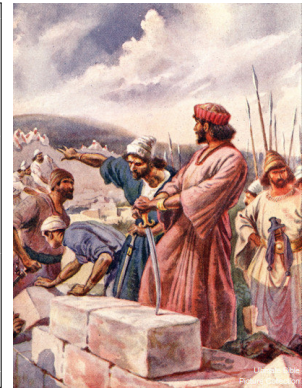


# The Sword and The Trowel

They which builded on the wall, and they that bare burdens, with those that laded, every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon. For the builders, every one had his sword girded by his side, and so builded (Nehemiah 4:17-18)

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## The Scriptures

Jesus said in John 5:39, “*You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me.*” Every Jew who heard His words knew what He meant by the Scriptures. They knew He was talking about what was written. This is not to say that there were no other writings in Hebrew, Greek, or Latin, but the Scriptures would be perceived as different from all of those. The Scriptures were a body of writing that constituted the word of God. Moses was instructed to write things down. “*Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Write this for a memorial in the book and recount it in the hearing of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven.’*” (Ex. 17:14). We do not know what materials Moses might have used. The Ten Commandments were written on stone tablets (Ex. 24:12). There were also writings from antiquity on a variety of other materials such as cloth, animal skins, and papyrus. Archaeologists have found writing materials in the tombs of Egyptian mummies. Writing as a science is a very ancient thing.

We read in Deuteronomy 31:9, “*So Moses wrote this law and delivered it to the priests, the sons of Levi, who bore the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and to all the elders of Israel.*” Then in verse 24 we have, “*So it was, when Moses had completed writing the words of this law in a book, when they were finished.*” What Moses wrote would be considered by any Jew as “The Scriptures.” We should consider it the same. Even though it might not be binding as God’s law today, it was still a revelation of the will of God.

There was a time when God guided Israel with a pillar of fire by night and a

pillar of cloud by day. That seems to have ceased when Israel reached the east side of the Jordan River. They would still have the Lord as a guide. Only now He would be guiding through the things written in the Scriptures. “*This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success*” (Josh. 1:8). What is mentioned in Joshua is in all likelihood what Moses had written in the wilderness.

About a thousand years later, under the reign of Josiah, this book of the Law once again is a prominent feature. “*Then Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the scribe, ‘I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the LORD.’ And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it*” (2 Kgs. 22:8). It may be the same one Moses had written or a copy of it. Nevertheless, it was still treated with the utmost respect and reverence. One hundred and seventy-five years Ezra had returned with some of the people from the captivity. One of the main things that he did was to make the few Israelites in Jerusalem familiar with the book of the Law. Everyone gathered together and the Law was read and explained to the people (Neh. 8:4-8).

All of this brings us to these three points.

1. The Bible was written by command of God. He certainly commanded Moses to write it down. John was also instructed likewise on the Isle of Patmos. “*What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia*” . . . “*Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this*” (Rev. 1:11, 19).

Notice the three fold character of what John was to write: what you have seen; the things which are; and the things which will take place after this. That is past, present, and future. John was to write it all and leave nothing out.

2. The Bible was written under the guidance of God. In 2 Peter 1:21 we find this: “*knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit*” (2 Peter 1:20-21). David said and it is recorded, “*The Spirit of the LORD spoke by me, And His word was on my tongue*” (2 Sam 23:2). It was the Lord’s words and not the words of Ezekiel that Ezekiel spoke, “*the word of the LORD came expressly to Ezekiel the priest. . .*” (Eze. 1:3). Those men of old time did not make up the prophecies that came from them. It was God who speaking through them. They spoke the words of God.

3. The Bible was preserved by the providence of God. Moses commanded that the book of the Law be placed by the side of the Ark. No safer place could be found in all of Israel! Today there have been zealous men who have preserved copies of the New Testament. We have three codices (Sinaiticus, Alexandrinus, and Vaticanus) which are dated back to the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> centuries A. D. We have copies of the Septuagint (a Greek version of the Old Testament) older than that. God’s word tells how the word will endure (Matt. 24:35). The exact details are not given. However, we can investigate things and determine with confidence that the Scriptures we have today are indeed the Scriptures.

There is another place in the New Testament where the word “Scriptures” is used. This is in 2 Timothy 3. In particular we want to look at verses 15-17, “*and that from childhood you*

*have 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."*

The very first thing mentioned in these verses is that the Scriptures play a central role in salvation. They are "*able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.*" No one today can learn anything about Jesus apart from the Scriptures. It is the Old Testament that speaks of Him and of His coming. It is in the New Testament that we meet Him and learn of Him and develop our faith in Him. We are told how we cannot please God without faith (Heb. 11:6). Neither can we have faith without the word of God - - the Scriptures (Rom. 10:17). The word is said to be able to save our souls (James 1:21). This is because it tells us about Jesus and about His gospel. One excellent example of this is when Peter preached at the house of Cornelius, "*The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ; He is Lord of all; that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they killed by hanging on a tree. Him God raised up on the third day, and showed Him openly, not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before by God, even to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead. To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins"* (Acts 10:36-43).

These Scriptures are said to be inspired. This literally means in the original language God-breathed. The English Standard Version renders this as

"*breathed out by God.*" It is the intelligent communication from the very essence of the deliverer. This marks a line between what comes from God and what comes from man. We have to determine if a teaching comes from heaven or from man (Matt. 21:25). We can only trust our salvation to those words that come from heaven.

2 Timothy 3:16 continues to tell us that the Scriptures are profitable for some very important things. One of those is doctrine. Doctrine simply means teaching. Sometimes you hear folks bemoaning the time spent in Bible Study talking about doctrine. I wonder what the alternative is? Folks, the Scriptures are for doctrine. As a matter of fact, the entire Bible is for teaching. Churches ought to have teaching that centers on the Scriptures and does not stray away from it. We ought to "speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine" (Titus 2:1). Doctrine is equally important to the one who teaches and the one who is taught (1 Tim. 4:16). That doctrine is to be obeyed from the heart (Rom. 6:17).

Another thing the Scriptures are profitable for is reproof. This is a word that is not common to our language today. It comes from a word meaning "conviction" although "convincing" might be a better choice. This word refers to evidence that will bring conviction. It is used in Hebrews 11:1 as "evidence", but is rendered in the ASV and ESV as "conviction." The Scriptures contain a lot of information or evidence designed to move one to conviction or faith.

The Scriptures are also profitable for correction. Thayer says this means "1) restoration to an upright or right state; 2) correction, improvement of life or character." Barnes says, "The meaning is, that the Scriptures are a powerful means of reformation, or of putting men into the proper condition in regard to morals. After all the means which have been employed to reform mankind; all the appeals which are made to them on the score of health, happiness, respectability, property, and long life, the word of God is still the most powerful and the most effectual means of recovering those who have fallen into vice. No reformation can be permanent which is not based on the principles of the word of God."

The Scriptures are said to be profitable for instruction in righteousness. Man needs to be familiar with the truth and he definitely needs reformation of life. He also needs to be told what is right and what is required of him that he might lead a holy life. Romans 1:16-17 tells us that the righteousness of God is in the gospel of Jesus Christ, or The Scriptures, if you will.

We find in verse 17 that the Scriptures properly understood and administered will allow the man of God (Christian) to be complete, a finished product. The Scriptures are going to reveal to him what good works are and how to be successful in them. The man of God will refer often to the Scriptures for guidance. I like to think of a Christian as similar to an oak tree. It grows to a certain level and then begins to produce its fruit (acorns). However, it continues to grow every day even after the acorns appear. It will continue to grow year by year with the production of acorns increasing. A Christian reaches a level of maturity (completion or perfection) where fruit is produced (cf. Jn. 15:2). Yet, that is just the beginning of maturity, not the end. Like an oak tree the Christian keeps growing and producing even more fruit. "*But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen*" (2 Peter 3:18).

Dear readers, next to Jesus Christ the Scriptures are the greatest gift God has ever bestowed on man. It does us good to have it so easily within our grasp. Yet, we must not just own a copy of the Scriptures, we must read them, study them, and obey them. That is how they do the very best good they can do. I hope and pray that you start today to do that and if you are I hope and pray that you will do even more.

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