

Preserved Text-v5. Early Recognition

Here I am again in the name of the Sovereign Creator of heaven and earth, the Lord Jesus Christ. Continuing with the historical evidence for Preservation, I will now discuss the early, or immediate recognition of the New Testament writings as being inspired.

Naturalistic critics like to assume that the New Testament writings were not recognized as Scripture when they first appeared and thus, through the consequent carelessness in transcription, the text was confused and the original wording 'lost' at the very start (in the sense that no one knew for sure what it was). But does that assumption square with the evidence? The place to start is at the beginning, when the apostles were still penning the Autographs.

The apostolic period

It is clear that the apostle Paul, at least, considered his writings to have divine authority; we may begin with Romans 16:24-25. "Now to Him who has power to establish you according to my Gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret through long ages, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic Scriptures, according to the command of the eternal God, with a view to obedience of faith among all ethnic nations." Paul declares that **now**, in his day, revelation was happening "through the prophetic Scriptures, according to the command of the eternal God", and those Scriptures included the Gospel that he, Paul, was preaching, and "the proclamation of Jesus Christ" (a reference to the four Gospels, presumably). The objective was conversions in all ethnic nations; only the Word of God could achieve that. To reach all nations, that Word would have to be translated into their languages; "the command of the eternal God" includes a worldwide distribution! [In passing, according to 95% of the Greek manuscripts, the correct position for 16:24-26 is 14:24-26, while the wording remains the same.]

Now consider 1 Corinthians 2:13, "which things we also expound, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Holy Spirit". Paul plainly declares that he received instruction from the Holy Spirit. And now 1 Corinthians 14:37, "If anyone thinks that he is a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things I write to you are the Lord's commands". Was Paul on an ego trip, or was he aware that he was writing under inspiration? Since he says something similar in a number of his letters, it is clear that he believed he was writing Scripture. Like in Galatians 1:11-12. "Now I want you to know, brothers, that the Gospel preached by me is not according to man; because I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather it came through a revelation from Christ." The plain meaning of these verses is that

Paul is claiming revelation, and that he received it directly from the glorified Christ!

Ephesians 3:5, “which in different generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets.” Paul declares that the Holy Spirit gave Revelation to various people. An apostle, upon receiving a revelation, would also function as a prophet, but people like Mark and Luke were prophets without being apostles. Colossians 1:25-26, “the Church, of which I became a servant according to the stewardship from God that was given to me towards you, to **complete** the Word of God, the secret that has been hidden from past ages and generations, but now has been revealed to His saints.” The normal and central meaning of the Greek verb here, πληροω, is precisely ‘to complete’, not ‘to fulfill’, or something similar. Why reject the normal meaning? Paul declares that God commissioned him to write Scripture! In fact, God caused fourteen of his epistles to be included in the NT Canon.

1 Thessalonians 2:13, “when you received from us the spoken Word of God, you welcomed it not as the word of men but, as it actually is, the Word of God”. Paul refers to the speaking or applying of the Word, emphasizing its divine origin. 2 Thessalonians 2:15 also deals with the authority of God’s Word, whether spoken or written.

It is clear that Paul expected his writings to have a wider audience than just the particular church addressed. In fact, in Galatians 1:2 he addresses “the churches of Galatia”; not to mention 2 Corinthians 1:1, “all the saints in Achaia”, and 1 Corinthians 1:2, “all who in every place”! In fact, as I have already suggested, it is probable that Paul sent out multiple copies of his letters.

John also is plain enough—Revelation 1:1-2. “Jesus Christ’s revelation, which God gave Him to show to His slaves—things that must occur shortly. And He communicated it, sending it by His angel to His slave John, who gave witness to the word of God, even the testimony of Jesus Christ—the things that He saw, both things that are and those that must happen after these.” That is how the book begins; and here is how it ends, 22:20: “He who testifies to these things says, ‘Yes, I am coming swiftly!’ Oh yes!! Come, Sovereign Jesus!” In other words, the whole book is what the glorified Christ is testifying, is revealing—as an eyewitness!! So then, the entire book is inspired.

And so is Peter. In 1 Peter 1:12,, he says with reference to the OT prophets, “It was revealed to them that they were not ministering these things to themselves, but to you; which things have now been announced to you by those who proclaimed the gospel to you, with the Holy Spirit sent from

heaven.” Peter declares that various people, certainly including himself, proclaimed the Gospel, accompanied by the Holy Spirit. 1 Peter 1:23-25: “having been begotten again, not from a corruptible seed but an incorruptible, through the living Word of God that remains *valid* forever. For: “All flesh is as grass, and all man’s glory as flower of grass. The grass withers and its flower falls off, but the Lord’s word endures forever.” Now this is the good word that was proclaimed to you.” [He quoted Isaiah 40:6-8] They were regenerated by means of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, that is found in the NT. Peter places NT material on the same level as the OT—it is the Word of God that endures forever. When Peter wrote, at least Mathew and Mark were already in circulation, and maybe Luke as well. 2 Peter 3:2 is to the same effect. Both Paul and Peter declare that a number of people were writing Scripture in their day.

I take it that in 1:3 Luke also claims divine inspiration; here are the first four verses:

Given that many have undertaken to set in order a narrative concerning those things that really did take place among us,¹ just as those who became eyewitnesses, from the beginning, and ministers of the Word delivered them to us,² it seemed good to me also, most excellent Theophilus, having taken careful note of everything from **Above**, to write to you with precision and in sequence,³ so that you may know the certainty of the things in which you were instructed.⁴

It will be noticed that I rendered “everything from Above”, rather than ‘everything from the beginning’. The normal meaning of the Greek word here, *ανωθεν*, is precisely ‘from above’, and I see no reason to reject that meaning. The more so since in the prior verse he already used the normal phrase, *απ αρχης*, that means ‘from the beginning’. I take it that Luke is claiming divine inspiration, up front.

Now I will consider a few verses where one apostle recognizes that another is writing Scripture. I begin with 1 Timothy 5:18. “For the Scripture says: “You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out grain”, and “The worker is worthy of

¹ Upon reflection it seems obvious that anyone who knew how to write would likely jot down salient points about Jesus, but Luke affirms that there were ‘many’ who attempted a serious account. Such records may well have furnished material, presumably factual, for spurious ‘improvements’ added to the four inspired accounts in the early decades of copying.

² Luke insists that his information comes from responsible eyewitnesses, who were there all the time.

³ In fact, with a few exceptions, Luke’s narrative is in chronological sequence, and as a physician he doubtless valued precision.

⁴ Given Luke’s stated purpose in writing, his account needs to be historically accurate. Note that Theophilus had already received some instruction.

his wages". The part about the ox is a quote from Deuteronomy 25:4, definitely Scripture, but the part about the worker is a quote from Luke 10:7! Now this is very instructive. Paul, a former Pharisee, presumably ascribed the highest level of inspiration to the five books of the Law, so we expect him to call Deuteronomy Scripture. But for him to place Luke on a par with Moses is little short of incredible. Although there may have been close to fifteen years between the 'publishing' of Luke and the writing of 1 Timothy, Luke was recognized and declared by apostolic authority to be Scripture not long after it came off the press, so to speak. For a man who was once a strict Pharisee to put Luke (still alive) on a level with Moses is astounding; it would have required the direction of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, if Paul wrote this letter under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, as I believe, then God Himself is declaring Luke to be Scripture!

In 2 Peter 3:15-16, Peter puts the Epistles of Paul on the same level as "the other Scriptures". Although some had been out for perhaps fifteen years, the ink was scarcely dry on others, and perhaps 2 Timothy had not yet been penned when Peter wrote. Paul's writings were recognized and declared by apostolic authority to be Scripture as soon as they appeared.

1 Corinthians 15:4 reads like this: "and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures". "The Scriptures" here presumably refers to the Gospels, because "on the third day" is not to be found in the OT. Did you get that? Since "on the third day" is not in the OT, the reference is to the Gospels, presumably.

In John 2:22 I would translate, "so they believed the Scripture, even the word that Jesus had spoken"—what Jesus said in John 2:19 was already circulating as 'Scripture' in Matthew 26:61 and 27:40 (when John wrote).

Clement of Rome, whose first letter to the Corinthians is usually dated about AD 96, made liberal use of Scripture, appealing to its authority, and used New Testament material right alongside Old Testament material. Clement quoted Psalm 118:18 and Hebrews 12:6 side by side as "the holy word" (56:3-4).¹ He ascribes 1 Corinthians to "the blessed Paul the apostle" and says of it, "with true inspiration he wrote to you" (47:1-3). He clearly quotes from Hebrews, 1 Corinthians and Romans and possibly from Matthew, Acts, Titus, James and 1

¹ I am aware that it could be Proverbs 3:12 (LXX) rather than Hebrews 12:6. Clement quotes from both books repeatedly throughout the letter, so they are equal candidates on that score. But, Clement agrees verbatim with Hebrews while Proverbs (LXX) differs in one important word. Further, the main point of Clement's chapter 56 is that correction is to be received graciously and as from the Lord, which is also the point of Hebrews 12:3-11. Since Clement evidently had both books in front of him (in the next chapter he quotes nine consecutive verses, Proverbs 1:23-31) the verbatim agreement with Hebrews is significant. If he deliberately chose the wording of Hebrews over that of Proverbs, what might that imply about their rank?

Peter. Here is the bishop of Rome, before the close of the first century, writing an official letter to the church at Corinth wherein a selection of New Testament books are recognized and declared by episcopal authority to be Scripture, including Hebrews (and involving at least five different authors).

The Epistle of Barnabas, variously dated from AD 70 to 135, says in 4:14, "let us be careful lest, as it is written, it should be found with us that 'many are called but few chosen'." The reference seems to be to Matthew 22:14 (or 20:16) and the phrase "as it is written" may fairly be taken as a technical expression referring to Scripture. In 5:9 there is a quote from Matthew 9:13 (or Mark 2:17 or Luke 5:32). In 13:7 there is a loose quote from Romans 4:11-12, which words are put in God's mouth. Similarly, in 15:4 we find: "Note, children, what 'he ended in six days' means. It means this: that the Lord will make an end of everything in six thousand years, for a day with Him means a thousand years. And He Himself is my witness, saying: 'Behold, the day of the Lord shall be as a thousand years'."¹

The author, whoever he was, is clearly claiming divine authorship for this quote which appears to be from 2 Peter 3:8.² In other words, 2 Peter is here regarded to be Scripture, as well as Matthew and Romans. Barnabas also has possible allusions to 1 and 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Hebrews, and 1 Peter. [Please note, both here and in following videos, the bibliographical references for my quotes from early Christian leaders are present in this text that I am reading; I will send it to anyone who asks, using my e-mail.]

¹ I have used the translation done by Francis Glimm in *The Apostolic Fathers* (New York: Cima Publishing Co., Inc., 1947), belonging to the set, *The Fathers of the Church*, ed. Ludwig Schopp.

² J.V. Bartlet says of the formulae of citation used in Barnabas to introduce quotations from Scripture, "the general result is an absolute doctrine of inspiration", but he is unwilling to consider that 2 Peter is being used. Oxford Society of Historical Research, *The New Testament in the Apostolic Fathers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905), pp. 2, 15.