



# BiBloS

A Teaching Resource of the British Bible School

From Byblos  
to *BiBloS*  
... a journey through time



DID SIR WALTER  
GET IT RIGHT?

When  
choosing  
God means  
certain suffering ...

The 'missing books'  
of the Hebrew Bible

First Palm Sunday -  
"I was there!"

*The return of the  
**LOST ARK:**  
Levitical city unearthed*



Issue 1 - March 2015

# Welcome

As this is the first issue of our magazine, *BiBloS*, a word or two of introduction and explanation are in order.

Firstly, we are thankful that you have decided to take a look inside. We've been thinking of launching a little teaching magazine for some time now, so we are actually rather excited to get this off the ground. *BiBloS* is to be published in an online format, three times each year, and downloadable from our web site.

The British Bible School exists to help equip the people of God for the mission of God through the Word of God, so this sort of thing fits well within our understanding of our mission.

As for the magazine itself, we have set out the following aims:

- To provide very good to high quality articles in various areas of Biblical studies and related subjects.
- To both directly and indirectly promote the work of the British Bible School.
- To encourage readers to engage more with the Bible, both through reading and more structured study.

To try to achieve this we will include an assortment of articles, word studies, reviews and other focus areas. We certainly welcome any feedback you care to give, and ideas of how we make it better - we just ask that you be gracious!

Each issue will have a featured theme, though not all articles will necessarily follow this. Supplementary material will be made available on our web site wherever appropriate.

Thank you for reading. Please feel free to share it far and wide. And may this be a blessing to us all, that we might be a blessing to the world in which we live.

*Patrick*

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# From Byblos to *BiBLoS*

Steven Whitehead



If you do not like what I am writing you can decide to boycott me. I hope you won't take such drastic action and please, whatever you do, don't lynch me. I am sure you have heard the words boycott and lynch and no, they were not the opening batsmen for Yorkshire. Captain Charles Boycott was an unpopular landowner in Ireland and Charles Lynch was a cruel Virginian magistrate who often went beyond what the law allowed and both of them have entered the English language. I expect you can think of other words that have come from people's names and the same is true of places, whether it is the popular racquet game first played at Badminton in Gloucestershire or the warm headgear first worn outside Balaclava in the Crimea. The technical term for these words is eponym, from a Greek word meaning "named from" and whether you knew the word or not no doubt you can think of other examples.

Here is another eponym. Our word Bible comes from a place: the ancient city of Biblos - sometimes spelled Byblos - in Phoenicia, which is today called Jbail and is twenty miles north of Beirut in Lebanon. The Phoenicians were well known as seafarers. In 1 Kings 9, for example, Solomon entered into a trading partnership with Hiram, the ruler of the Phoenician city of Tyre. Back before the Bible was written Byblos was a centre

for the import and export of papyrus. The papyrus plant grows best along the River Nile in Egypt but Egyptian ships were not as seaworthy as those of the Phoenicians who were known to sail as far as Cornwall where they traded for tin. So merchants from Byblos bought Egyptian papyrus and sold it around the Mediterranean. Papyrus gives us our word paper but Byblos eventually gave the Greeks their word for book: *biblion* and today we borrow the *biblio* prefix for anything related to books. A book-lover is a *bibliophile*, for example, and a list of books is a *bibliography*. But what about *The Bible*? This reminds us of the days when The Bible was considered to be the book of books, in part because it is indeed a collection of sixty-six books from Genesis to Revelation but chiefly because of its pre-eminence as the written word of God.

The Bible needs to be close to the heart of individual Christians and at the heart of the church for it is through the Bible that we meet God. Thus for many years Bible has been at the centre of the British Bible School and now, with this new magazine, we want to keep it there. *BiBLoS* looks back to the ancient Phoenician port where papyrus was sold and looks forward to the continuing ministry of the BBS in teaching others to teach the word (2 Timothy 2:2). We hope you will join us in this journey.



# Examining the Scriptures Every Day

Jon Galloway

*“These Jews were more open-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they eagerly received the message, examining the scriptures carefully every day to see if these things were so.” (Acts 17:11 NET)*

As Paul and his companions travelled throughout the Roman world, they taught both Jews and Gentiles about Jesus. They would normally go to the Jews first with the message that Jesus was the Messiah.

Have you ever wondered what texts Paul would have used to convince the Jews as to who Jesus was? When we preach Jesus, we normally go to the New Testament. The problem then was that in the middle of first century the New Testament had not yet been completed – the only scriptures they had were what we call the Old Testament. This is precisely where the apostles went to teach about Jesus. *“After they travelled through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. Paul went to the Jews in the synagogue, as he customarily did, and on three Sabbath days he addressed them from the scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and to rise from the dead, saying, ‘This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ’” (Acts 17:1-3).*

Although some were convinced, others created opposition to the point that Paul and Silas needed to leave Thessalonica for their own safety. They left Thessalonica and travelled on to Berea. Again, they went to the Jewish synagogue with the same message, but this time there was a

different reaction. These Jews listened and compared what Paul was teaching with the scriptures to see if what he was teaching was true.

These Jews would have been very acquainted with the Old Testament scriptures. They would have been taught them from the time they were young. Paul was teaching something that would have been new to them, something they had never heard before. Rather than relying on what they thought they knew, they returned to the scriptures to investigate what Paul had proclaimed concerning the Messiah. The result was that *“many of them believed, along with quite a few prominent Greek women and men” (Acts 17:12).*

What a great example for us. We should always be willing to open God’s word and examine the scriptures carefully to see if what is taught is what we find recorded. But do we even have a passing familiarity with God’s word so that we can check out what we hear? To many Christians, the Bible is a book which is an enigma to them because they’ve never spent time with it.

So what is the solution? Like the Bereans, Christians should spend time with God’s word every day. It is only by learning God’s word that we can evaluate what we hear. It is only through learning God’s word that we can apply it to our lives so that we can be the people God wants us to be. The only way we can *“grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18)* is to spend time reading and studying the Bible.

# “There is but one”

Patrick Boyns

There is, in Edinburgh, the largest monument to any writer in the world. It stands in Princes Street Gardens and is dedicated to Sir Walter Scott, the celebrated Scottish novelist and poet.

Scott had suffered from illness most of his life and following a recuperative visit to the Mediterranean aboard a government frigate he returned to his home at Abbotsford near Melrose - in the Borders. In his account of Scott's life, John Lockhart writes: 'Next morning he was still better. After again enjoying the Bath chair for perhaps a couple of hours out of doors, he desired to be drawn into the library, and placed by the central window, that he might look down upon the Tweed. Here he expressed a wish that I should read to him, and when I asked from what book, he said: "Need you ask? There is but one." I chose the 14<sup>th</sup> chapter of St. John's Gospel; he listened with mild devotion, and said when I had done: "Well, this is a great comfort - I have followed you distinctly, and I feel as if I were yet to be myself again." In this placid frame he was again put to bed, and had many hours of soft slumber.'<sup>1</sup>

"Need you ask? There is but one." Just one book.

Of course, this one book is actually a mixed collection of smaller books, but as a volume it surpasses all



THE LIBRARY AT ABBOTSFORD - JUST ONE?

others. More than being just a 'very good read' or the perpetual 'bestseller,' the book we call *The Bible* is absolutely unique - there really is only one like it. And it is unique in that its contents have been 'breathed out' by God, making it unlike any other book ever written.

Though the idea of there being 'only one book' - to say nothing of there being only one name by which we might be saved or only one way by which we might come to the Father - might be seen by many today as being somewhat intolerant, if not arrogant, once we understand the origin and nature of this book it all makes perfect sense.

If there is one God who created all that is both seen and unseen, including humanity with the ability to communicate with one another, then it seems quite reasonable to



ABBOTSFORD HOUSE, NEAR MELROSE

<sup>1</sup> Lockhart, J. G., *The Life of Sir Walter Scott: Vol. II*, 256

expect that were he to communicate with us he would do so in a consistent and

breathed out by the breath of God - is that they were penned by those who knew him.

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**... you might also want to read their letters, e-mails and shopping lists, listen in on their telephone conversations, rummage through their personal documentation and study their photograph albums.**

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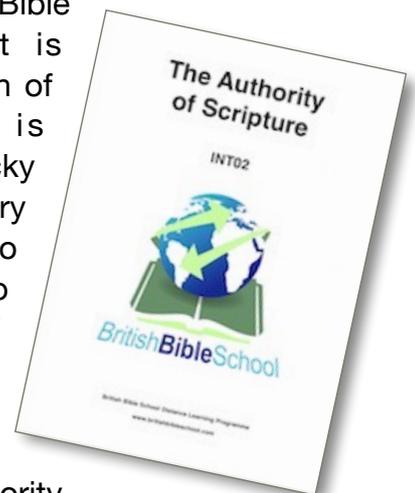
unified fashion. If his purpose was to reveal himself to us in such a way that we might understand, then it makes sense that he would do so within the context of relationships - both with individuals and with collective groups. In this way God shows himself at work within the course of human history, primarily through the history of one chosen nation, and ultimately in the unique revelation of himself through his Son whom he sent, as it were, in our image - that we might know the nature and very mind of God himself.

Our own experiences teach us that if you really want to get to know somebody, you will not only want to rifle through their diary, but you might also want to read their letters, e-mails and shopping lists, listen in on their telephone conversations, rummage through their personal documentation and study their photograph albums. You will look at all different kinds of information to build up the big picture of what the person is really like. That is why God's one book is actually a collection of documents, of all different shapes and sizes.

I am sure that that is the sort of thing that Lockhart might have done when researching the life of Sir Walter Scott - except that he had a distinct advantage: he knew the subject of his biography intimately. He was first his personal friend and then his son-in-law. And it will come as no surprise to hear that one distinguishing attribute of those documents that together form the book we call *The Bible* - though

So we have one unified revelation, revealed not in one single time or place, but in a collection of individual books or documents of many different types. There is law, historical narrative, there are poems and letters, there is prophecy and so on. The Bible as a whole collection of books makes sense of reasonable assumptions and expectations of revelation. Of course, there is much more that could be said of these expectations and of the processes of revelation, but the question still remains as to how we might know what ought to be in this 'one book' or whether the book we know as *The Bible* is indeed where God has spoken.

To answer this we need to delve into the area of 'canonicity' and examine the 'canonisation' of the Bible and discuss what is known as the 'canon of Scripture.' This is actually a rather tricky subject, so the very best that we can do here is simply to make some brief observations. More avid readers will want to pursue our Module on 'The Authority of Scripture.'



In this context, a 'canon' is essentially an authoritative, definitive list of documents that go together to make up a recognisable collection. We might want to

ask: “By whom is it to be recognised?” And this is a useful question. You may be aware that different traditions recognise alternative authoritative lists or canons. For example, if you were to look at the contents of a Roman Catholic Bible you would notice that their tradition holds to an alternative canon when it comes to recognising the books it regards as being authoritative Old Testament Scripture. Then there are those who suggest that almost any number of other ancient writings have as good a claim to be a part of the New Testament as many of those books already in it. So how can we tell which is the correct canon? How do we decide which books should be in, and which ones kept out? These are significant questions.

Thankfully, canonicity is not really about deciding which books ought to be in the Bible, and which ones left out - it is really more about recognising where God has spoken. A book is not considered to be canonical because someone or some people decided that it was authoritative and so should be included in the Bible - it is canonical because it is from God. Where God determines canonicity - we simply discover it. This is a really important principle to grasp.

In his book *God has Spoken*, J. I. Packer argues against the idea that “it was the post-apostolic Church that established the New Testament” canon of Scripture and he gives a very useful illustration. He says: “The Church no more gave us the New Testament canon than Sir Isaac Newton gave us the force of gravity. God gave us gravity, by His work of creation, and similarly he gave us the New Testament canon, by inspiring the individual books that make it up.”<sup>2</sup> Of course Isaac Newton did not invent or create gravity - he recognised it by observing an apple falling from a tree (or so we are told). In the same way, mere



**SIR ISAAC NEWTON - INVENTOR OF GRAVITY?**

mortals didn't determine the extent of the canon - we merely discovered it.

The process of canonisation is not about some authoritative religious body or church council determining which books are to be given divine authority - God already determined that when he breathed his words through the prophets who wrote them into the pages of Scripture. A book is authoritative, and hence canonical, only because it has come from the mouth of God.

We need to understand that this is not merely some mechanical process in which academics tick boxes, fill out forms and compile reports before heading home for afternoon tea. This is a lengthy and sometimes complex procedure in which faith in the purpose of God plays an important part. We are dealing with matters that originate beyond this physical realm - discovering truths that truly transcend the arenas of conventional science and academia. One book? Most certainly! But one book, wholly unique in origin, nature and purpose.

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<sup>2</sup> Packer, J. I., *God has Spoken*, 109

# The Source of Authority in Christianity

*Mark Hill*

As in any area of life, authority is exercised in some form or another, both by individuals and groups, throughout the world of Christianity. Leadership takes on so many varied forms that believers often become confused as to what constitutes legitimate practice of Biblical authority. Some Christians in positions of leadership exercise Biblical principles of authority, while others apply human standards, perhaps mixed with some godly principles. Christian leaders do well to have a healthy understanding of Biblical teaching relating to authority which must be derived from the Word of God.

The basis of all authority is God. He is our Maker. He, therefore, has the absolute right to command and it is our absolute duty to obey Him. God governs personally and also delegates authority to others. God the Father delegated authority to God the Son. (See Matthew 28:18; Hebrews 1).

There is a difference between power and force. Power, when directed by intelligent love, is always pleasing to us. There is force in a lightning bolt. Jesus Christ, who is God himself, is a manifestation of the power of God, not of the force of God.

As long as Jesus was on earth, He talked with people face to face. Directly under His command they could claim His promises directly. But He has passed away from earth and does not rule anymore by His own direct authority. Just as the Father delegated His authority to the Son, so Jesus delegated His authority to the apostles.

In the transfer of authority from God the Father to the Son there was no danger of error or mistake. The Son, being divine, could receive without misunderstanding all that the Father communicated. But the apostles were human with all the weaknesses and imperfections of their humanity. There was danger, therefore, that they might not correctly understand or apprehend the revelation which Christ made to them.

It became necessary, therefore, for some power or influence to be exerted on their minds to preserve them from error either in taking in or in giving out the teaching which they received. Christ therefore promised them the Holy Spirit, who was to guide them into all truth in the conveying of the Gospel to the world. (See John 16:12-15; 1 Corinthians 2:9-13).

The Spirit-guided apostles were the representatives of God on earth for the purpose of making known His will to the sons of men. Their teaching is Christ's teaching. Their authority was the authority of the Lord. "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." So, when the apostles completed the revelation of the will of God in Jesus Christ, that revelation became the perfect law of liberty to which nothing could rightfully be added or taken away.

Anyone who teaches others to disobey the plain commandments of the apostles cannot be guided by the same Spirit that inspired them to proclaim these commandments. The same Spirit which led an apostle to proclaim truth will not lead anyone else to ignore or to disobey that truth.

# biblegateway.com

Steven Whitehead

I like the permanence of books: what was written stays written until a new edition is published. Websites, though, are different. Sometimes they wither away, becoming increasingly obsolete and irrelevant as time moves on (for example sites dedicated to once popular bands). Then there are those sites that change so quickly that it is impossible to say anything specific as by the time you have read the review the site will have changed yet again. So here is a snapshot of the useful [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com) as of March 2015.

The original multilingual searchable Bible website, Bible Gateway was started in 1993 by Nick Hengeveld, a student at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan, who had a visionary passion to make the Bible digitally accessible to everyone through the very new technology that was to become known as the Internet (see <https://www.biblegateway.com/about>). Since 2008 Bible Gateway has been part of Zondervan Publishing which is in turn owned by HarperCollins, part of Rupert Murdoch's media empire. The site is currently free to use and is funded by advertising and links to various relevant products.

Bible Gateway's great strength and the main reason I use it is its range of searchable Bibles that are readily available. Currently there are Bibles in dozens of languages, from Cherokee to Czech, and - of far greater interest to most of us - more than fifty English Bibles, making it incredibly easy to compare and contrast different translations. Bible Gateway is

quick. In my village Broadband is a trickle and my computer while adequate is by no means state of the art or top of the range yet I can find passages in the many versions available faster than I could pull the book off the shelf and look it up - even if I happened to have the translation in question. (I have checked: I have fifteen different translations on my desk so Bible Gateway wins on quantity as well as speed.)

Alphabetically the translations run from the *American Standard Version* (1901) to *Young's Literal Translation* (1898). I confess that I had to look up these dates but each translation has a brief history page for those seeking this information. Several versions are available in different editions so Bible Gateway makes it quick and easy to see where and how, for example, the different versions of the *New International Version* differ. Available are the *NIV Reader's Version* (1996), the

current *NIV* (2011), and the *NIV-UK* (also 2011). We note that the original, "classic" *NIV* is no longer available on Bible Gateway, probably at the behest of its American publishers.

There are many other tools available at Bible Gateway, some more reliable than others. You can sign up for various daily devotionals, follow reading plans, listen to audio Bibles, and access study guides. There is so much here that it is impossible to cover everything in a brief survey so we recommend visiting [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com) to explore for yourself while offering a useful piece of advice: *caveat lector* ("reader beware").

*"Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night." (Psalm 1:1)*

# Law, Prophets and Psalms

Patrick Boyns

Are there really 39 books in the Old Testament? Well if the question is asked at your local village quiz, that might be the safest answer to give. But is it really correct?

You might have been told that there are 39 books in the Old Testament - you might have even counted them for yourself - but were you to have lived in the days of Jesus then you would have seen things differently.

Firstly, in the time before the writing of what we know as the *New Testament*, there was no such thing as the 'Old Testament'. Those writings were simply spoken of collectively as 'the writings' or 'scriptures.' And in Jewish circles today would still be regarded as the same - and would more properly be spoken of as the *Hebrew Bible*. And secondly, the *Hebrew Bible* has only 24 books.

You may remember how we generally divide up the books of the Old Testament: five books of law; twelve books of history; five books of poetry; five large books of prophets; and twelve smaller books of prophets. That makes 39 in total. But what if we were to rearrange them?

At some point in history, the Jews arranged their sacred writings into three distinct sections. As to exactly when they did that, we cannot be totally sure, but it seems almost certain that that is the way they were by the time Jesus lived on earth.

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**"... everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."  
(Luke 24:44 ESV)**

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It is quite possible that even earlier they were simply divided into two sections - the law and the prophets - but then of course

this whole process evolved over a period of time as the Scriptures were being revealed, book by book, and we cannot expect to find a complete final arrangement until they were finally completed - around 400 years before Christ.

Let's see how this arrangement looks. We'll keep the first five books as they are - these are the Law or the *Torah*. These were revealed through Moses, a prophet of God, and as they form the basis of the covenantal relationship that God has with Israel, they form a core section all by themselves.

The next section is the *Prophets* - and this is where it might get a little tricky. The Prophets were divided into two sub-sections: the Former and the Latter Prophets. The Former Prophets are Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings - where the two books of Samuel and the two books of Kings were combined respectively into single books. The Latter Prophets are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and ... The Twelve - where those generally referred to today as 'The Minor Prophets' were combined into one book. But what about Daniel? And did we not miss out Chronicles and Ezra and Nehemiah and so on? Well all of these are included in a third section usually referred to as the *Writings* or 'The Psalms.' This section is made up of: Psalms, Proverbs and Job, then Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes and Esther, and then Daniel, Ezra/Nehemiah (that's also one book) and finally Chronicles (which, like Samuel and Kings, is again combined into a single book).

All of that comes to 24 books. That is noticeably less than the 39 books with which we are familiar. But fear not! The content of the *Hebrew Bible* is the same content as we have in our *Old Testament*, only arranged differently.

# The Value of the Bible

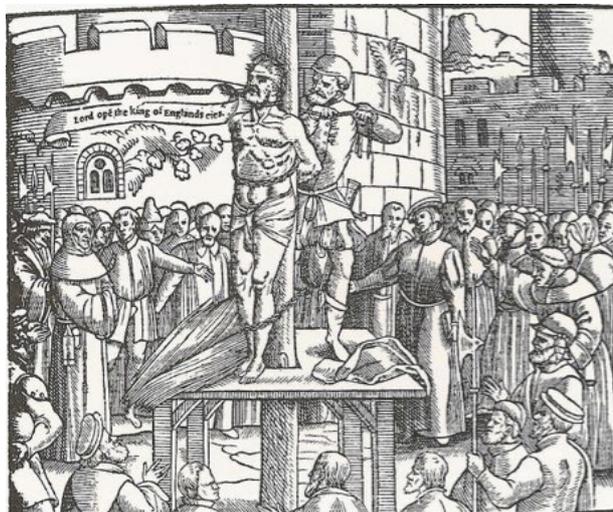
John Griffiths

Today we are in the privileged position of having available to us the Bible in our own English language. The fact that we can have a copy of the Bible in English is due in large measure to the work and vision of William Tyndale (c.1484-1536). Throughout the Middle Ages the Bible had become the exclusive property of the clergy. It was not accessible or available to ordinary people. It was written in Latin, a language no longer spoken or understood by the people, and since there were no printing presses all copies had to be produced by hand, hence they were rare and expensive. The development of the printing press in the mid 15<sup>th</sup> century made it possible for affordable Bibles to be produced in huge numbers. Men like William Tyndale had a vision of the Bible being made available in the English language so that the ordinary people could read it for themselves. Tyndale's work was opposed in England by church and political leaders and he had to flee to



WILLIAM TYNDALE

Europe to continue his work. In 1526 he produced his first edition of the New Testament in English. Copies were smuggled in to this country, and many



WILLIAM TYNDALE, BEFORE BEING STRANGLD AND BURNED AT THE STAKE, CRIES OUT, "LORD, OPEN THE KING OF ENGLAND'S EYES"

were confiscated and burnt. Tyndale produced a second edition in 1535. By then he was in prison and had been condemned as a heretic. He was put to death near Brussels in 1536. He was tied to a stake, strangled and his body was then burned. Before he died, his final words are reported to have been, "Lord, open the king of England's eyes."

Although Tyndale did not live to see it, work on the translation of the Bible into English continued, and a change of attitude on the part of Henry VIII made the Bible more readily available to the people. The Authorised Version of 1611 is based largely on Tyndale's translation of the New Testament.

Today the Bible is freely available in many different versions and formats and it remains a best seller. Yet despite the availability of the Bible, and the sacrifices made by men such as William Tyndale, it is a sad reflection that its contents are not

as valued or appreciated as they might be. The Bible is unique; there is no other book like it. It is the written record of God's communication with mankind. To help us appreciate the value of the Bible we shall consider the words of the apostle Paul written to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:14-17.

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*But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*

*(2 Timothy 3:14-17 ESV)*

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### **Continue in what you have learned**

Paul encourages Timothy to “continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed.” Timothy had been taught the word of God, and he is encouraged to remain or continue in those things he had learned. Paul wrote at a time when false teachings were beginning to threaten the church, and so he wanted to ensure that Timothy would hold on to those core truths he had been taught. Paul tells Timothy that he is to continue in those things he has learned and “firmly believed”. Timothy firmly believed the things he had been taught, convinced of their truth.

Timothy is exhorted to continue in the things he has learned because he knows from whom he learned them. Paul himself had been Timothy's teacher of the things he firmly believed (2 Timothy 1:13; 2:2; 3:10). Timothy knew that Paul had been appointed a preacher, apostle and teacher

of the gospel. He had confidence in Paul as his teacher, therefore he could continue in the things he had learned from Paul, the things he had firmly believed.

Although there was much that Paul had taught Timothy, Timothy's education in the scriptures did not begin with Paul. In verse 15 Paul reminds Timothy, “how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.” Timothy became acquainted with the sacred writings from his childhood. A faithful grandmother (Lois) and mother (Eunice) influenced Timothy (2 Timothy 1:5). We are first introduced to Timothy in Acts 16:1 where we learn that his mother was a Jewish believer whilst his father was a Greek. It was his grandmother and his mother who took on the responsibility of ensuring he was educated in the sacred writings and planted the seed of faith that grew.

Paul goes on to say that the sacred writings that Timothy had become acquainted with since his childhood “are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.” Paul is talking about the Old Testament scriptures here, but he still says they are able to teach a person how to be saved through faith in Christ Jesus. We might think that it is the New Testament scriptures that lead us to faith in Christ, but there is a consistent theme throughout the Bible, and that theme is Jesus Christ. Jesus Himself said that the Old Testament scriptures testified of Him (John 5:39,46; Luke 24:25-27). The Bible used by the early church was the Old Testament, and those scriptures could instruct people for salvation in Jesus Christ. These scriptures were added to as the New Testament writings were completed and recognised as being of equal authority. Here then is the value of the scriptures for us today, they can still instruct us for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

## The origin of the scriptures

Having spoken of the value of the scriptures in relation to our salvation, Paul continues in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 to speak of the origin and purpose of the scriptures. With regard to its origin, scripture is from God. Paul states the fact of inspiration when he says, "All scripture is breathed out by God." The idea here is that scripture is a product of the creative breath of God, God breathed out scripture, and thus scripture is God's word in written form. The phrase "all scripture" would apply to the whole of the Old Testament, and it anticipates the New Testament writings that were in the process of being written and added to the collection of scripture. The fact that scripture is God-breathed means that it is truth. In John 17:17 Jesus said that the word of God is "truth." The Bible is not true in the sense that it conforms to some accepted standard of truth, but rather it is the truth, it is the standard of truth by which all other things are to be judged. As the ultimate standard of truth, the word of God is the final authority on all matters concerning our lives and our relationship with God.

## The purpose of the scriptures

Paul goes on to speak of the purpose of the scriptures when he says in verse 16 that they are useful "for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness." The scriptures are useful because they are inspired; their divine origin ensures their usefulness. The scriptures are profitable for teaching. Through our study of the scriptures we learn the great teachings of the Bible. We learn about God, about Christ, about mankind, we learn the story of God's love for us. The scriptures are useful for reproof. The scriptures point out to us the

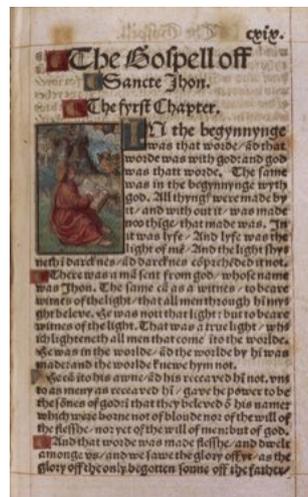
things that are wrong, they convict us of our wrongdoing. The scriptures tell us of sin, what sin is and the effect that sin has on our lives. The scriptures are useful for correction. Once the scriptures have convicted us of our wrongs they can also correct us. They tell us how we can have forgiveness of our sins, how we can be reconciled to God and to one another. The scriptures are useful for training in righteousness. The scriptures show us how to live righteous lives that are pleasing to God.

The Bible is a very practical book, teaching us what is right, what is not right, how to get right when we go wrong, and how to stay right. The Bible can do this because it is the word of God.

God is teaching us through His word. Paul goes on to say in verse 17, "that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work." The study and application of God's word to our lives will make us complete or mature and it will equip us for service. God's word provides us with everything that we need to live a life that is pleasing to God.

There are many books that might be helpful to us, but we can always get by without

them. In contrast the Bible is God's inspired word; it is unique and as such it is completely adequate to meet our every need. However, knowledge of the Bible will not be of much use to us if we do not apply its message to our lives. The Bible requires a response from us and when we respond in obedience to God's word our lives will be transformed. The Bible is not an antiquated message; it is not boring, but a message that is true and relevant to every generation. The word of God is powerful; powerful enough to change and transform us into the people that God wants us to be.



PAGE FROM TYNDALE  
NEW TESTAMENT

# Moses' Choice

Mitch Vick

*“By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter.”* (Hebrews 11:24, NIV)

Few would deny that Moses ranks as one of the greatest men of Old Testament times. His shadow falls across 1,500 years of Hebrew history, and his presence pervades the New Testament also. Yet we would probably know nothing of him had he not made a crucial choice for God and His people.

The story of Moses begins with the faith of godly parents who would not let him be killed at birth (Hebrews 11:23). Instead, his mother initiated a series of events that led him to be adopted as “the son of Pharaoh's daughter,” with her as his nursemaid (Exodus 2:1-10). He was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action” (Acts 7:22). Furthermore, he had access to “the treasures of Egypt” (Hebrews 11:26).



Despite these advantages, Moses could not ignore the fact that he was a Hebrew, and the time came for a choice with life-changing consequences. “When Moses was forty years old, he decided to visit his fellow Israelites” (Acts 7:23). The writer of Hebrews adds to the story: “By faith Moses, when he had grown up,

refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward” (Hebrews 11:24-26).

After killing an Egyptian taskmaster to protect a fellow Hebrew, he then intervened in a dispute between two other Israelites but was rebuffed. Moses then realised the death of the Egyptian was not a secret, and the Israelites were unwilling to accept him as their deliverer from slavery (Acts 7:24-28). In fear he fled the country and exchanged the court of Egypt for the life of a lowly shepherd. Then, at the age of eighty, God called Moses to deliver Israel out of Egyptian slavery and lead them to the Promised Land of Canaan (Acts 7:29-36).

The choice of Moses to leave his comfortable life as an Egyptian for one of hardship with God's people has important lessons for us:

1. We can overcome our upbringing. No matter how a person is brought up, he or she can still choose God's path. Neither advantage nor disadvantage bars us from His service.
2. It is noble to suffer for God's cause. The nobility and power of the Egyptian court was nothing compared to the glory Moses found in God's service. We find true nobility serving the King of Kings.
3. The pleasures of sin are temporary. Do not be seduced by the passing pleasures of sin. Nothing is worth missing the joy of God's Kingdom!

# Mark: The Gospel Truth

## (Part One)

*Steven Whitehead*

Most of us notice but some of us do not: all sentences start with a capital letter, contain a finite verb, and end with a full stop. This is the way we punctuate nowadays but of course not all languages punctuate in the same way. The Bible, to take an important example, contained much less punctuation when written than we might expect. However when we look deeper we see that the writers of the Bible did things differently. We take paper and pens for granted but these were luxury items to the ancients. Indeed paper as we know it did not exist. Either animal hides were scraped clean to make vellum, or papyrus plants were cut into strips and rejoined to make papyrus. Both were expensive and so would not be wasted. In the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford there is a piece of broken crockery on which a letter had been written. It starts off with “My dear friend, I must apologise for writing to you on this broken plate but it was all I could find.” Paper - or papyrus - was such a luxury the scribes did not want to waste any of it. So Hebrew writers left out vowels and Greek and Roman writers did not leave

any gaps between words and without gaps between words there is nowhere to put the punctuation. The later invention of word-gaps was criticised by some for making it too easy to read God’s word. PraisetheLordthattheylostthatbattle!

There is much that we take for granted that was not in use back then. Speech marks, for instance. Take that most famous of Bible verses: John 3:16. “For God so loved the world.” We know it but we do not know who said it. Was it Jesus speaking or John commenting on what Jesus had just said? Either way the meaning is the same but we do not and cannot know from the text who actually said the words. However the ancients did have other ways of conveying sense where we would punctuate. When a later writer was passing on information he had heard from someone else he would make it clear. Not with speech marks and a footnote but by saying so both at the beginning and end. “My grandfather told me. . .” followed by the anecdote and then closed with “That’s what my grandfather said.” Which sounds like the way an oral society would transmit memories; memories that would eventually become history.

Stories - fiction, we would say - would be identified differently. We are familiar with “Once upon a time” which are not the words the ancients used but it gets across the point: this story is made up and I, the story teller, can change it to suit my needs.

So if I am telling it in Athens I can add local colour: “Once upon a time the goddess Athena visited her city Athens and. . .” And when I am in Corinth it



THE ASHMOLEAN MUSEUM IN OXFORD

becomes: "Once upon a time the goddess Aphrodite visited her city Corinth and. . . ." The same recipe but different ingredients and signalled differently than something that was believed to be true.

In the Gospels we are dealing with truth. Fact, not fiction. We need to remember the opening words of L. P. Hartley's novel *The Go-between*.

"The past is a foreign country, they do things differently there."

Note the speech marks!

The Gospel writers did things differently. Not necessarily better or worse but different. In a modern biography we would expect the author to state his - or her - sources, usually in the form of a footnote; to use quotation marks to indicate when the exact words are being given; to distinguish between direct quotes and a general summary of what was said.

We distinguish between historical writing, biographical writing, and news reports. The ancients did not define these writings quite as we do. History, for them, tended to be beyond living memory and concerned much more with political and military matters than personal, biographical material. History was what happened back in the days of our grandparents' grandparents. Many of us have known at least some of our grandparents but knowing your grandparents' grandparents is much less likely and probably has not happened since the earliest chapters of Genesis. So to find out about our grandparents' grandparents and their life and times we have to use other forms of knowledge beyond eyewitness testimony.

But the gospels - Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John - were written within the life times of many eyewitnesses. This was an expectation of ancient biography, that the life of a famous man (or, much more rarely, a famous woman) would be told in the

words of those who saw and heard what made him famous: the eyewitnesses.

If you were planning on writing the story of Jesus we would expect to meet certain people in the pages of your book. Jesus, obviously; His parents; His friends - and enemies. And some of the famous people in the background. The Roman Procurator, for example: Pontius Pilate; the Jewish High Priest: Caiaphas. Both present and correct. Thanks to the work of archaeologists we now know thousands of names from Roman-occupied Judaea. Some are Latin or Greek but most are Hebrew, although the Jews at the time did not tend to use many different names, preferring to keep to traditional ones. Sometimes there was a patronymic element: "son of"; or 'bar' in Hebrew. So we meet Bar-ptolemy or Bartholomew to use the Anglicised version. Then there is Bar-abbas, Simon, bar Jonas and so on. Or nick-names: Cephas (Peter in Latin), the Rock; Simon the Zealot and so on. And the names in the New Testament fall well within the range of what we would expect. We would recognise when a name sounds wrong. We read a Jeeves and Wooster story, for example. That's Reginald Jeeves and Bertram Wilberforce Wooster, written by Pelham Greville Wodehouse. Their Christian names date them for us: Edwardian. So if a Wayne or



Kylie walked into a Jeeves and Wooster story we would do a double-take. Those names were not used back then. Likewise the names in the New Testament ring true. Actually, there are a surprising number of names given, some of which seem superfluous. Take Blind Bartimeus, for example. Why does Mark bother to name him in chapter ten? Why not just tell about the blind man that Jesus made see again? And Jairus whose daughter died in chapter five? Why not just describe him as the synagogue official? Could it be that these names are given because they were known to be eyewitnesses? Had they met Jesus, later been added to the church, and told their story to any and every one? So that when Mark wrote down what they told him he fixed their names in the record. I believe that this is possible, probable, even.

But there is more. As we said earlier, there was the way of book-ending a remembered story by introducing the person who told the story and then concluding with the same name. “My grandfather told me. . . The story. . . That’s what my grandfather said.” (The technical name for this is *inclusio*.) So when we read a name at the beginning of a story and then see the same name at the end we should be alert to what is happening. If we go to the start of Mark’s gospel, the first disciple we meet is Simon Peter. In Mark 1: 16 we read:

“As Jesus was walking by Lake Galilee he saw Simon and Andrew, Simon’s brother.”

Some translations skip the second mention of Simon and say that Jesus saw Simon and his brother Andrew, not Simon and Simon’s brother. It seems that Mark is emphasising that Simon is the main man here, not his brother Andrew. And the last disciple to be named by Mark is Simon, except that now he is Peter. In 16:7 we read:

“But go and tell the disciples and Peter.”

So Mark starts with Simon and ends with Peter and in between it is Peter who is named the most. Twenty-eight times as either Simon, Simon Peter, or Peter. John is next with twenty-five name-checks and the two James (the son of Alphaeus and the son of Zebedee) manage double figures, with fifteen between them. None of the other disciples reach double figures. Could it be that Mark is telling Peter’s story? I believe that the internal evidence from within Mark’s Gospel tells us that it is, using the techniques available to him. Also I believe that there is compelling evidence from outside of the Gospel that confirms this, which is what we will look at next time.

(To be continued ...)

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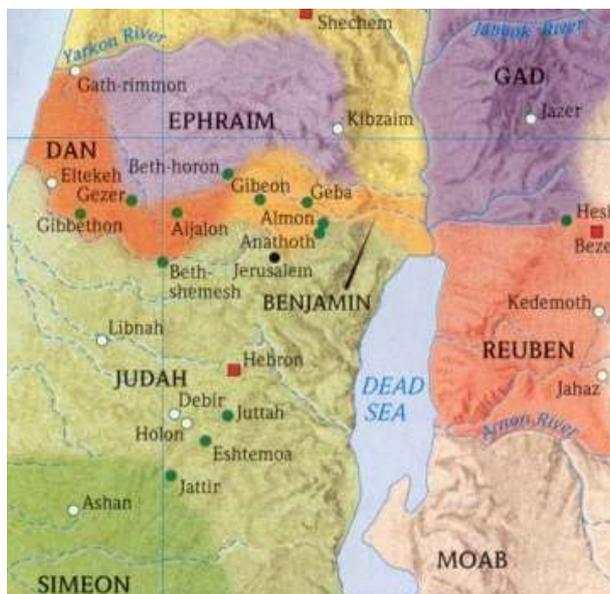
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# Tel Beth-Shemesh

Patrick Boyns

When the Israelites entered the land promised by God to their forefathers, Joshua assigned 48 'cities' to the tribe of Levi, as Moses had instructed. One of these cities was Beth-Shemesh, in the territory of



Judah (Joshua 15; 21), less than 20 miles west of Jerusalem and overlooking the Sorek Valley where Samson was to meet Delilah (Judges 16). It was in this same valley where the inhabitants of Beth-Shemesh would be reaping their wheat harvest when they saw the ark of the covenant being returned by the Philistines years later (1 Samuel 6).

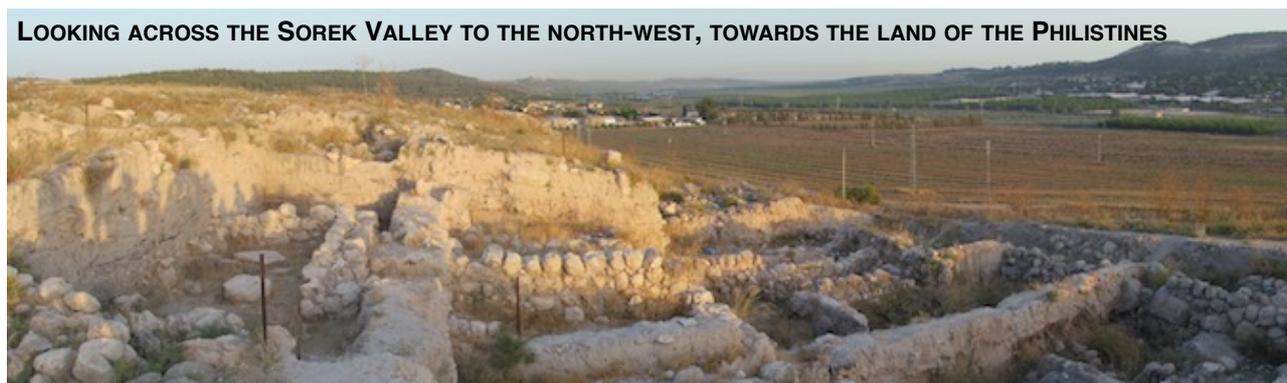
The site has been excavated during three periods in recent times. The first was just over a hundred years ago, in 1911-12, by the Palestine Exploration Fund, with further

excavations made by Americans between 1928-33. More recently, since 1990, the site has been excavated on a more or less annual basis under the directorship of Shlomo Bunimovitz and Zvi Lederman of Tel Aviv University. Dale Manor of Harding University in America serves as field director, and was my initial point of contact with the dig.

Excavations at Tel Beth-Shemesh have revealed occupation from at least as far back as the Middle Bronze Age (from about 1800 B.C.) when Canaanites occupied the land, continuing until Iron Age II when the Assyrians destroyed the city in 701 B.C., with only minor occupation subsequent to that. During the Late Bronze and Iron Ages, Tel Beth-Shemesh found itself at the geographic meeting point of three different ethnic and cultural groups: Canaanites, Israelites and Philistines, making the site particularly interesting as a scene of significant historical events and cultural changes.

The constant view north across the Sorek Valley was most evocative. From the pass in the west leading towards the land of the Philistines from which the ark returned, to the site of Timnah and its associations with Judah, Tamar and later Samson, there was much to occupy the mind. If only these stones would speak!

[More of this on the web site!](#)



# On Palm Sunday

Steven Whitehead

The first time I saw Jesus was from a great height, which is a statement that requires explanation. I am involved in Temple security in Jerusalem. I am not a priest - I do not have the priestly line of Aaron - but I am of the tribe of Levi and so am permitted to help the priests in their duties. My responsibilities lie in keeping the holy Temple and its surroundings peaceful and orderly. And, when required, to do the same elsewhere in the Holy City. On the day I saw Jesus I had been sent to the South Gate, the one close to the Pool of Siloam, if you know Jerusalem. I had been detailed to assist the Romans as this was the week before the Passover festival when pilgrims flock in to the City. The



**PART OF THE STEPPED SIDE OF THE SECOND TEMPLE POOL OF SILOAM FROM THE TIME OF CHRIST**

visitors are faithful Jews from across the land and indeed from throughout the Roman Empire and even beyond. The wealthy lodged in the city and the not-so-wealthy found cheaper places to stay outside and walked in each day.

The Romans tended to leave routine security to us but during the run up to Passover they got a bit twitchy. They did not like the crowds so all leave was cancelled and a special watch was kept

for known trouble-makers to stop them from entering the City. Trouble-makers like crowds; they find them a good place to hide. So a watch was kept at all gates. A “visible presence” was how they described it. And with all Roman detachments a local translator. In this case, me. So I spent the day high above the gateway looking down the road as it climbed up to the City. For much of the day there was little to do. The people were cheerful and in a holiday mood. Just occasionally a suspect would be spotted and brought in for questioning. Very few spoke Latin and some had no Greek either which was when I was called in.

As I say, it was relatively quiet that year. Relatively. The Romans had brought in some trouble-makers not long before. Barabbas and his gang: a bad lot. The other hot-heads were angry but they were all talk and no action. The Romans were watchful but not tense. By late afternoon the officer in charge was talking about standing down some of his squad. More pilgrims were leaving than arriving and the gates would be shut at dusk. But then we heard shouting and I was told to translate. To me it sounded like Hosanna which was what I told the officer. He told me that I was there to translate not to repeat what they could all hear for themselves. I told him that Hosanna was religious: a traditional Hebrew shout of praise.

“Praising what,” he asked.

“Our God,” I replied.

“Should I be alarmed?” he asked, resting his right hand on the pommel of his sword.

I wanted to tell him that he and all his accursed army of occupation should be very afraid. That one day every Roman in

the country, in my country, would be driven out. One day. But for now I kept my peace and explained that all Hosanna meant was that the people were in high spirits as they looked forward to the festival. All this was true but not quite the whole truth. Hosanna is Hebrew, the language of the educated. But for most of us who speak Aramaic rather than Hebrew, *Hoshanna* means something different: Save us! Set us free! But I thought there was no reason to trouble the Romans with too much information.

By now the crowd had come into view as they followed the winding path up from Bethany. Some were waving branches. The officer wanted to know what that was all about and then answered his own question as he saw they were palm branches. He knew that for us palm branches were a national emblem. We Jews are well known for not using pictures or statues and this Roman had heard that palm branches were almost a kind of national flag. Was he going to put two and two together? I had to admit that I had no idea what was happening but kept that knowledge - or lack of it - to myself. There was no way I was going to tell a Roman that I was puzzled. But then I saw the centre of attention: a man riding on a donkey. I started to bluff. See that man on the donkey, I said. He must be an important rabbi, a teacher of our holy law. The people are showing their respect to him and thus to our Law and our God. Well, it sounded convincing to me. What I wasn't saying was that the donkey was significant. You may know that we have a tradition that dated back to when we had our own kings.



**A MODERN DAY PALM SUNDAY PROCESSION IN JERUSALEM**

Great men like David and Solomon. When a king went out to war he rode on his war horse but when he came back he rode a donkey. I suppose it was a way of showing that the war was over. Anyway, when the king returned - assuming he had won - the people would flock out of Jerusalem to welcome him home. Cheering and waving palm branches. And then there was a prophecy that the Romans didn't need to know about. The Prophet Zechariah promised that one day a son of David would return to David's City, riding on a donkey.

Of course the Romans did not know any of this but they did recognise a public order offence when it came cheering up the hill towards them. The officer sent a runner up to HQ to report and I was sent back to inform the High Priest.

At this point I had no idea that the man on the donkey was Jesus and from where I was watching I could not see him clearly. But I did see a lot more of him over the next week. If you are interested perhaps I can tell you more some other time.

*Shalom.*

P. S. You can read a little background to this article on our web site [here](#).