

The Apostolic Writings
Divinely Inspired Scripture or Corruption of Man

I regard the Word of God as being infallibly inspired, and therefore if I find difficulties in it, which I must do from the very nature of things, I accept what God says about those difficulties, and pass on. The Word of God does not profess to explain all mysteries: it leaves them mysteries, and my faith accepts them as such.

~ Charles H. Spurgeon

The question often arises if one can trust the Apostolic Writings as true, authoritative, and divinely inspired. How we answer this question is indicative of our level of trust, belief, and faith in an omnipotent God. And further, if we refuse to accept them as divinely inspired, it calls into question our view of Yeshua and His deity. I defend my argument in this paper from a stance of unapologetic bias. I believe the sixty-six book canon in its present form is the divinely inspired, inerrant, exhaled word of Adonai, and further, it has been preserved just as He intended. I believe the fullness of deity dwells within Yeshua and that He is YHWH in human form who came to live amongst His created. My bias is unapologetic in that those in covenant with Adonai cannot separate their faith from their scholarly work; the Scriptures are meant to be accepted as truth having the full ability to conform us to Adonai's holiness when we submit to their authority.

The Scriptures may be read as history and as great literature of poetry and prose and even as a theological treatise, but it is ultimately Adonai's revelation to His created and its purpose is to create a holy people, set apart to a holy God. In his book, *The Journey from Texts to Translations*, Wegner says this:

It is no accident that the Bible came down to us through so many centuries with such accuracy and power. God intended us to live our lives by this

book, and many people dedicated themselves to the preservation of its scared text.¹

This paper seeks to prove three facts to refute Bart Ehrman's stance that the Apostolic Scriptures are a corruption of man: First, Yeshua is the authority, and by extension the Apostles, on which the Apostolic Writings stand; secondly, the canon was not chosen with extrinsic measures by church councils; thirdly, the oral culture in which the Apostolic Scriptures were birthed is reliable.

Bart Ehrman is a well known New Testament scholar and a Christian turned agnostic. His work methodically attacks the validity, accuracy, and authority of Scripture. He promotes the idea that the New Testament canon was created extrinsically by the church in order to control truth by authority. He also suggests a "gap theory" whereby between the time the events of Yeshua's life and ministry occurred and their recording, the gap of time allowed for corruption of the writings due to the faulty memories of those who repeated the stories orally. And because Yeshua is the self-authenticating and authoritative foundation of the Apostolic Scriptures, in order for Ehrman to make his argument work, he must undermine the deity of Yeshua and relegate Him to a mere man, simply a Jewish teacher.

On Scripture and Authority

In Paul's second letter to Timothy, he makes a bold claim concerning Scripture.

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. ~ 2 Timothy 3.16-17 ESV

1. Paul D. Wegner, *The Journey from Texts to Translations* (Baker Academic, 2004) p. 24

Wegner makes an important point that random men were not penning random words with Adonai unaware, later happening along to breathe life into the author's creation. He explains:

The recording of Scripture was an innately complex process. God appears to have been so intimately involved in the lives of its writers that he knew what they would say and even how they would say it. Their individual personalities were thus combined with the indwelling, guiding work of the Holy Spirit to create Scripture.²

Tim Hegg defines this work as being “superintended” explaining that Adonai utilized human authors, but did not override their humanity to accomplish His work.³ Adonai specially chose prophets to deliver His words. Hegg explains their derived authority,

This is the basis of the divine inspiration of Scripture: God putting His words in the mouth of the prophet, and the prophet declaring God's word to the people. And because the word of the prophet was God's word it came with divine authority. The word of the prophet was infused with the divine imprimatur of authority.⁴

As Peter is divinely inspired to write his second letter, he makes an important statement concerning this authority:

For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,” we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no

2. Paul D. Wegner, *The Journey from Texts to Translations* (Baker Academic, 2004) p. 29

3. Tim Hegg, *How We Got Our Bible* (Torah Resource, 2019) lecture 2

4. Tim Hegg, *How We Got Our Bible* (Torah Resource, 2019) p. 177

prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit ~ 2 Timothy 1.16-21ESV

Wegner expounds on the above verses,

These verses emphasize that the message spoken by the authors of Scripture originated not with them but rather through the Holy Spirit. Scripture differs from the messages of false prophets, which come from their own imagination.⁵

It is important to note, in the beginning, the only Scriptures were the Tanach. The Apostles and early believers held them to be their sacred Scriptures. As the Apostles penned their letters to the community of believers at large, the communities faithfully copied and disseminated these letters within their communities, and each one understood the chain of authority began long before the authors wrote the first word. In fact, it could be traced all the way back to Adonai Himself writing the first words and handing them directly to Moses.

When He had finished speaking with him on Mount Sinai, He gave Moses the two tablets of testimony, tablets of stone, written by the finger of God.
~ Exodus 31.18 NASB

First, we have evidence of Adonai writing His word and handing it to Moses, then we have Yeshua, the prophet greater than Moses, YHWH in the flesh, Who comes and speaks words directly to His created. From His own mouth, He commands His disciples to deliver His message to the world. And because the Apostles and early believers fully understood Yeshua to be YHWH, His words became the authority on which the Apostolic Scriptures stand.

On Canonicity

In his lecture on canonicity⁶, William Mounce summarizes the meanings of extrinsic and intrinsic in relation to canon. In short, extrinsic is the idea that the church chose specific books itself determined to be authoritative. Intrinsic takes a different approach. It supposes the church

5. Paul D. Wegner, *The Journey from Texts to Translations* (Baker Academic, 2004) p. 29

6. Dr. Bill Mounce, "Why I Trust My Bible: Lecture 8, Canonicity," Internet Source (November 12, 2020) www.biblicaltraining.org

chose the canonical books because they were already perceived as authoritative showing that the writers of the Apostolic Scriptures inherently possessed authority and this authority was recognized by the church.

In his book, *The Question of Canon*, Michael Kruger delves into this topic challenging the extrinsic model. Kruger ends his book this way:

The intrinsic model is a historical model, designed to explain how and when the New Testament canon emerged within the early Christian religion. It simply argues that the phenomenon of canon was one that arose early and naturally within the first few stages of Christianity. Indeed the later church played a key role in shaping and influencing the contours of the canon, and no doubt various “heretical” movements would have also played a part in the canon’s development. But the intrinsic model argues that the idea of canon was built into the DNA of the Christian religion and thus emerged quite naturally. In this sense, the canon was like a seedling sprouting from the soil of early Christianity - although it was not fully a tree until the fourth century, it was there, in nuce, from the beginning.⁷ (Kruger, 210)

The councils did not create a canon by collecting random books written by random men. The councils gathered books already considered to be authoritative. And where did they find proof of this authority? From the very books themselves. Consider how Yeshua imparts authority to those whom He chose:

And whoever does not receive you nor listen to your words, as you leave that house or city, shake the dust off your feet. ~ Matthew 10.14 NASB

For it is not you who are speaking, but it is the Spirit of your Father who is speaking in you. ~ Matthew 10.20 NASB

And He appointed twelve, so that they would be with Him and that He could send them out to preach, and to have authority to cast out the demons. ~ Mark 3.14-15 NASB

7. Michael J. Kruger, *The Question of Canon* (InterVarsity Press, 2013) p. 210

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and remind you of all that I said to you. ~ John 14.26 NASB

for the words which You gave Me I have given to them; and they received them and truly understood that I came forth from You, and they believed that You sent Me. ~ John 17.8 NASB

Concerning the Book of Hebrews, Kruger wisely points out an important fact. As scholars debate the author of the book, they overlook an important aspect of his identity:

Unfortunately, such a limited focus has led many to overlook a far more important fact about the author, namely that he presents himself as directly dependent upon apostolic tradition. When referring to the “great salvation” that his letter explores, the author indicates that this message of salvation “was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those that heard, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit.” (Hebrews 2.3-4)⁸

He explains that “those who heard” is a reference to the Apostles themselves, that “attested” points to their authority and as they spoke the message to the author it was confirmed to him. He goes on to say this:

Thus, the author portrays himself as being in a very similar situation to that of Mark or Luke - authoritative apostolic testimony has been entrusted to him and he is now passing it along to his readers.⁹

When we turn to the Patristic writings, we find evidence of a chain of authority¹⁰:

I Clement who refers to the apostles as “the greatest and most righteous pillars of the church,” says this: “The apostles received the Gospel for us from the Lord Jesus Christ, Jesus the Christ was sent from God. The Christ therefore is from God and the Apostles from the Christ.”

8. Michael J. Kruger, *The Question of Canon* (InterVarsity Press, 2013) p. 147

9. Michael J. Kruger, *The Question of Canon* (InterVarsity Press, 2013) p. 148

10. Michael J. Kruger, *The Question of Canon* (InterVarsity Press, 2013) p. 67-69

Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, says: “The Lord did nothing apart from the Father....neither on his own nor through the Apostles.”

Irenaeus says, “We have learned from none others the plan of our salvation, than from those through whom the Gospel has come down to us, which they did at one time proclaim in public, and, at a later period, by the will of God, handed down to us in the Scriptures, to be the ground and pillar of our faith.”

Jerome had a clear opinion concerning the Apocryphal books. “The Old Testament Apocrypha are an example of life and instruction in manners, There appears to be a clear understanding from the very beginning that certain writings were imbued with Divine authority and others were not.

The Accuracy of Orality in Ancient Cultures

Dr. Bailey¹¹ proposed a new model for analyzing the oral tradition of the Apostolic Scriptures which lies between two views: the Bultmannian and the Scandinavian School of Riesenfeld and Gerhardsson. The Bultmannian view is what Bailey refers to as an “informal uncontrolled” model and is defined by the characteristics that anyone may retell the story and there is no control for accuracy in its retelling. A good example would be a rumor. The Scandinavian School is what Bailey calls a “formal controlled” model and is defined by the characteristics that only specific people may retell the story and persons in authority exhibit control over its retelling. Excellent examples of this would be: 1) Rabbis overseeing the memorization and recitation of Torah, and 2) Greek teachers performing the same action over students memorizing Homer’s *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. And while both models are exhibited in Middle Eastern cultures, it is a third model proposed by Bailey that offers a best option for understanding and analyzing the oral tradition as exhibited in the Apostolic Scriptures.

11. Kenneth E. Bailey, “Informal Controlled Oral Tradition and the Synoptic Gospels,” *Themelios* 20.2 (1995) pp 4-11

Bailey's median view combines aspects of both the Bultmannian and Scandinavian views, which he titles the "informal controlled" model, also referred to as "guarded tradition." In this view, anyone may retell the story, but elders in the community control its transmission. He categorizes five settings with varying degrees of control and flexibility. The five categories are: 1) proverbs and sayings, 2) story riddles, 3) poetry, 4) parables and stories, and 5) well-told accounts of important figures in the history of the community. The first three categories have no flexibility in their retelling. They are recited verbatim as they have been passed down orally from generation to generation, overseen by an elder in authority. For the purposes of this paper, categories four and five are the focus and have a parameter of controlled flexibility. Here we find a unique convergence. In the oral recitation of a story, the basic flow of the story remains intact along with its conclusion. Names remain unchanged. Facts remain unchanged. However, at any point the story could reflect the story teller's own style. As Bailey states, "...the story-teller had a certain freedom to tell the story in his own way as long as the central thrust of the story was not changed. So here was continuity and flexibility. Not continuity and change. The distinction is important...The individual story-teller is allowed freedom within limits."¹²

As we read through the Apostolic Scriptures, we find account after account that fit Bailey's model and lends credence to his theory. One might consider the Gospels where similar stories are told, but there are slight variations in the details - none of which change the story itself.

12. Kenneth E. Bailey, "Informal Controlled Oral Tradition and the Synoptic Gospels," *Themelios* 20.2 (1995) p. 9

We may also turn to the books of Luke and Acts. We find that Luke has addressed his letters to a man named Theophilus. Although we do not know who Theophilus was, it seems likely that he was both a patron sponsoring Luke's work and a new believer in need of further instruction or clarification. The dating of Luke's works are early with Luke dating approximately the late 50's to early 60's CE and Acts dating between 60-63 CE.¹³

Since many have undertaken to compile an account of things accomplished among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, it seemed fitting to me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in an orderly sequence, most excellent Theophilus; so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught. Luke 1.1-4 NASB

Here we have Luke, a companion of Paul, writing a history for Theophilus so he may know "the exact truth about the things you have been taught." In 2 Timothy 1.1, Scripture confirms that Paul is an "Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ." We have an established chain of authority from Yeshua to the Apostle Paul to Luke who is writing to Theophilus to establish the truth of what is being taught in the community.

In Conclusion

But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.
~ 1 Corinthians 2.14 NASB

I have failed to give Erhman his due as a scholar in this paper. Although for all his work and status attained as a scholar, his views are secular in nature having disavowed his faith. His assertion seems to stand that faith is not required and is therefore a handicap to the one seeking

13. Mark Strauss, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Background Commentary*, 4 vols. (Zondervan, 2002) 1.322

truth. If the Scriptures were given for the sole purpose of gaining knowledge of exhaustive historical events, we would find them to be inadequate. But we know this is not their purpose. Knowledge alone can solve problems of ignorance, but it is faith married with humble submission, to first Yeshua as Lord and Savior and second to Scriptural authority, that illuminates truth. And it is this truth, found solely in the divinely inspired, God-breathed Scriptures, that conforms us to the holiness in which we are called. The Scriptures are the very Word of God that we return to time and again, and on which we conform ourselves to a holy and omnipotent God Who Himself began the process of writing down His words and gifting them to Moses.

Charles Spurgeon once penned these words, “The word of God is the anvil upon which the opinions of man are smashed.” I find the opinions of man are worth precious little unless they are sprouted and fed from the fertile foundation of faith. Try as we might to explain to the Bart Erhman’s of the world our acceptance by faith in the mysterious ways in which Adonai accomplishes His will, they will not understand because as Paul tells us they are spiritually appraised, perceived as foolishness to the natural man. One without faith is handicapped in such matters and rendered helpless to grasp the truth in their quest for knowledge. The elect of Adonai must balance their faith in their truth seeking. It is the gift of faith and the workings of the Holy Spirit that allows us wisdom and discernment to filter through knowledge gained and sift it thoroughly for Adonai’s truth. And Adonai’s truth is the only knowledge worth obtaining.

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