

The Discerner

the voice of... **Religion Analysis Service**

A QUARTERLY EXPOSING
UNBIBLICAL TEACHING & MOVEMENTS

Volume 31, Number 3

July • August • September 2011

Eckankar

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Judaism

Neopaganism

MOONIES

Universalism

Wicca

Islam

Hinduism
Exposed!

MORMONS

BAHA'I FAITH

Buddhism

Scientology

Satanism

In This Edition:

Office Notes2
RAS Team

Dear Reader3
by Rev. Laurence J. Sutherland

With This Issue4
by Rev. Laurence J. Sutherland

Peter Enns: Attacks on the Old Testament5
by Steve Lagoon

Spiritism and the Witch of Endor10
by Roy E. Knuteson, Ph.D.

The "Inspired Version"—Inspired by Whom?15
by William McKeever

All About the Koran.....19
by Caroline Alexander

QUIZ: Denominations/Backgrounds.....30



*"Hereby know we the spirit of truth
and the spirit of error" 1 John 4:6*

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Scott Horvath

1313 5th St. SE, Mail Unit 5

Minneapolis, MN 55414-4504

612-331-3342 / 1-800-562-9153

FAX 612-331-3342

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OFFICE NOTES

We appreciate all the notes and special contributions over the summer months. God bless you all!

We welcome Dr. James K. Walker as our new Board of Reference member. Dr. Walker is President of Watchman Fellowship and describes its ministry as "an independent, nondenominational Christian research and apologetics ministry focusing on new religious movements, cults, the occult, and the New Age". Our welcome goes out also to Scott Horvath as our new board member. Scott is trained in the food industry.

Have you examined our extensive archive of articles and general information (over 300 articles cataloged from 1987-2007) that can be accessed through our website: info.ras.org?

As noted above, our new president is Rev. Steve Lagoon, longtime board member and RAS research writer. He succeeds Dr. Ronald McRoberts, who has retired, but remains on the board. Dr. McRoberts deserves our deepest thanks for his leadership of RAS from 2004-2011, years of existential uncertainty following the 25 year old ministry of Dr. William BeVier.

Update: The January-March 2002 edition of The Discerner contained an article by Steve Lagoon entitled "The Gospel in the Stars Controversy". We were recently contacted in our office by Arne Herstad who was quoted in the article. Mr. Herstad wishes us to inform our readers

that he no longer advocates support for the gospel in the stars position.

We praise God for our team that is working conscientiously together to counteract error and, at the same time, defending the “faith once delivered” (Jude 12).

RAS TEAM

DEAR READER

The United States is presently in the throes of a presidential contest with political parties lining up on the various issues that beset this nation, our families, and our churches. There are the older issues of abortion, gay marriage, Israel, unemployment, pornography, and diversity. But now newer controversies are provoking frequent rancorous debate. For instance, should the government or parents determine family sexual values, or what about dealing with “Chrislam”, an attempt to bridge differences between Christianity and Islam, or the prospect of Sharia laws imposed upon us?

In the midst of this raging battle, I believe that our risen Lord calls us to earnest reflection, repentance, and prayer. He wants us to demonstrate resolute convictions (Ephesians 6:10,11) and defiant foreheads (Ezekiel 3:8) against evil, and to maintain a watchful and discerning eye on events in the Middle East. It seems that so many facets of end time biblical truth are converging that point to the soon return of our Lord Jesus Christ to receive His church and to manifest His sovereignty and power over all nations.

In our church we often sing the chorus, “Days of Elijah”:

“These are the days of Elijah,

Declaring the Word of the Lord....

(Refrain) Behold He comes, riding on the clouds,

Shining like the sun at the trumpet call”.

The tune is rapturous, but the text-truth is even more so. Are we ready, brother, sister, to meet Him? Are we declaring the Word of the Lord? Yes, these words are evangelistic, but also exhortative. As we declare the Word, we should simultaneously exemplify Christ in our daily walk. Paul admonishes us in Ephesians 5 to walk in the light, in love, in wisdom, and to exhibit the “fruit of the Spirit in all goodness, righteousness, and truth” (V.1-9).

*Wishing you good reading, meditation, and application,
Laurence J. Sutherland*

WITH THIS ISSUE

Dare we challenge a leading evangelical Old Testament scholar as to basic tenets relating to the creation account in Genesis? Our research writer and RAS president, Steve Lagoon, delights to do the hard work of observation, analysis, and evaluation as he deals with Professor Peter Enns' exposition of Genesis. Enns has adopted hermeneutical points that weaken, according to Lagoon, the literal, historical, conservative and biblical view of creation and early mankind.

Also in the area of Old Testament theology is Dr. Roy Knuteson's treatment of the after-death appearance of Samuel to Saul, Israel's king. Dr. Knuteson studies the various interpretations and then forcefully crafts his own. This story of the Witch of Endor and its seeming approval of necromancy must be included in our understanding of occultic practices.

The last two contributions examine the holy writings of the Mormons and the Muslims, respectively. Rev. William McKeever, who has ministered among Mormons for many years, exposes the blatant fallacy of Mormons to assert the divine inspiration ("fairy tales") of the book of Mormon. Similarly, but in a very different way, using a succinct, staccato and abbreviated outline style, Caroline Alexander displays the many confusing and conflicting facets of Koranic precepts. The reader is left to draw his own conclusions as to the accuracy and inspiration of this book.

The quiz provokes us to test our knowledge of our historic Christian roots. I wish you a good score!

Laurence J. Sutherland

PETER ENNS: NEW ATTACKS ON THE OLD TESTAMENT

By Steve Lagoon

This article is intended to raise alarms concerning new approaches that are being used to undermine the integrity and inspiration of the Bible. What is most troubling is that these new teachings are coming from those claiming to be evangelicals. Fundamental understandings of the Scriptures are being undermined by professors in conservative colleges and seminaries.

In this article, I will focus on the teachings of Peter Enns as presented in his book *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament*¹ since this book is being used as a textbook in conservative schools, and is representative of new approaches of compromise concerning the integrity of the Bible.

Enns' incarnational model

A central idea of the book is Enns' incarnational model of Scripture. Enns calls this the "incarnational analogy."² Just as the incarnate Jesus was God and man, so the Scriptures have both a divine and human aspect. This is undoubtedly the case for even the most ardent conservative believes that God used human authors, but guided them to say just what he wanted them to say in the Scriptures (2 Peter 1:21).

However, for Enns, the human aspect of Scripture seems to imply that the Scriptures contain errors and reflect the mythological understanding of the times in which they were written.

Is Genesis myth?

For instance, Enns states that the "Genesis story is firmly rooted in the worldview of its time."³ Enns amplifies this idea:

Christians recoil from any suggestion that Genesis is in any way embedded in the mythologies of the ancient world. On one level this is understandable. After all, if the Bible and the gospel are true, and if that truth is bound up with historical events, you can't have the beginning of the Bible get it so wrong. It is

1 Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids MI (Baker Book House, 2005).

2 Enns, *Inspiration*, 18.

3 Enns, *Inspiration*, 27.

important to understand, however, that not all historians of the ancient Near East use the word myth simply as shorthand for ‘untrue,’ ‘made-up,’ ‘storybook.’ It may include these ideas for some, but many who use the term are trying to get at something deeper. A more generous way of defining myth is that it is an ancient, pre-modern, pre-scientific way of addressing questions of ultimate origins and meaning in the form of stories: Who we are? Where do we come from? Ancient peoples were not concerned to describe the universe in scientific terms.⁴

Though Enns does not say he rejects the former understanding of myth as “untrue” or “made-up,” he favors⁵ the latter understanding of myth as “pre-modern, pre-scientific way of addressing questions of ultimate origins.” Enns asserts that the creation and flood accounts of Genesis were written by those who held a pre-modern, pre-scientific understanding of the origins of the world and mankind. Enns implies that these creation and flood accounts are not true in the modern understanding of science and history.

Enns’ thesis doesn’t explain why God would need to or would choose to work through pre-modern, pre-scientific myths that were “made up” rather than simply conveying directly through revelation what actually happened. Since God was not time bound with a pre-modern, pre-scientific mindset, why didn’t He just say what actually happened in His holy Word?

Genesis, myth, and made up stories

Does Enns really believe that accounts in the book of Genesis (i.e. the creation account) were made up stories? I don’t know how you can read the following passage and conclude otherwise:

Ancient peoples composed lengthy stories to address these types of questions [ultimate origins] . . . So stories were made up that aimed at answering question of ultimate meaning . . . Does this indicate that myth is the proper category for understanding Genesis? . . . To give a hint of where this discussion is going, it is worth asking what standards we can reasonably expect of the Bible, seeing that it is an ancient Near Eastern document and not a modern one. Are the early stories in the Old Testament to be judged on the basis of standards of modern historical inquiry and scientific precision, things that ancient peoples were not at all aware of? Is it not likely that God would have allowed his

⁴ Enns, *Inspiration*, 40.

⁵ Enns states, “Allow me to repeat how I use the word myth in the discussion below: Myth is an ancient, premodern, pre-scientific way of addressing questions of ultimate origins and meaning in the form of stories.” Enns, *Inspiration*, 50 (Enns uses the same definition on page 40).

word to come to the ancient Israelites according to standards they understood, or are modern standards of truth and error so universal that we should expect premodern cultures to have understood them? The former position is, I feel, better suited for solving the problem.⁶

It is difficult to understand how Enns' thesis about these Genesis accounts can be viewed as revelation if God simply adopts false statements about the most fundamental questions man asks. Why wouldn't God cut through all the myths of the cultures surrounding Israel and tell Israel how things really happened? Certainly God knew how He created the world and had the ability to communicate this to the Israelites and to the world.

In Enns' view, God takes as part of His inspired Bible, things that are simply not true, but adds a new wrinkle to them to convey some truth through the errors: "To put it differently, God adopted Abraham as the forefather of a new people, and in doing so he also adopted the mythic categories within which Abraham—and everyone else—thought."⁷ Then, says Enns, "God transformed the ancient myths so that Israel's story would come to focus on its God, the real one."⁸

Enns needs to explain why God would adopt pagan mythic answers to ultimate questions, answers that are not scientifically and historically true, rather than just revealing the way things actually happened. Again, if God was going through the trouble of transforming these ancient myths so that they would focus on the real God, why not also transform the myths so that they would be in accord with the way things actually were and are?

Enns teaches: "The opening chapters of Genesis participate in a worldview that the earliest Israelites shared with their Mesopotamian neighbors . . . And that context was not a modern scientific one but an ancient mythic one."⁹ Enns suggests that God adopts these false myths as backdrops to point Israel in the direction of the true God. In other words, God used falsehood to teach truth. It seems strange to me to suggest that God would adopt mythic answers to the most basic questions of origins that He knows will eventually have to be discarded as men move into a more modern way of thinking. How much of the Scriptures are like this? How do we know which parts of the Bible simply reflect the cultural beliefs and worldviews of the times and which parts are timeless truths? Enns' view of Scripture leaves the Bible as so much silly putty to be shaped at the whim of the interpreter.

6 Enns, *Inspiration*, 41.

7 Enns, *Inspiration*, 53.

8 Enns, *Inspiration*, 54.

9 Enns, *Inspiration*, 55.

Implications of Genesis as myth or history

Enns affirms: “We do not protect the Bible or render it more believable to modern people by trying to demonstrate that it is consistent with modern science.”¹⁰ But I would argue that if Genesis is wrong about the ultimate questions of origins, we are right to question its inspiration, for surely God both knew how the world came to exist and could convey this in His Word. Conversely, the fact that Genesis does have it right provides reason to have confidence in the rest of the Bible.

Enns argues:

It is a fundamental misunderstanding of Genesis to expect it to answer questions generated by a modern worldview, such as whether the days were literal or figurative, or whether days of creation can be lined up with modern science, or whether the flood was local or universal . . . It is wholly incomprehensible to think that thousands of years ago God would have felt constrained to speak in a way that would be meaningful only to Westerners several thousand years later. To do so borders on modern, Western arrogance.¹¹

I think the arrogance is on Enns’ part when he suggests that ancient men didn’t think of ultimate questions in realistic ways. As though only modern people could understand the difference between a literal or figurative day, or whether the whole world was covered with water or only a part of it.

It appears to me that Enns wants to “have his cake and eat it too” in the sense that he wants to remain in the evangelical world while espousing liberal views of Scripture, perhaps so he can be accepted in academia.

Monotheism versus Henotheism

I want to address one more area of concern from Enns’ book where it deals with “diversity” in the Old Testament. He asserts that the Old Testament has not always affirmed strong monotheism (as is usually assumed), but at times the Old Testament affirms henotheism (henotheism being defined as the belief that many gods actually exist, while being devoted to only one of them). Indeed, Enns is correct in pointing out that at times, the Israelites devolved into various forms of idolatry, polytheism, and henotheism.

But I take exception with Enns to his claim that God condescended

¹⁰ Enns, *Inspiration*, 55.

¹¹ Enns, *Inspiration*, 55.

to Israel's henotheistic beliefs. In other words, since God knew that the Jews believed other gods actually exist, He goes along with the charade in inspired passages of Scripture. Enns quotes from several Psalms that speak as though other gods do exist. For example, Psalm 95:3 states: "For the Lord is the great God, the great king above all gods" (see also Psalms 86:8; 96:4; 97:9; 135:5, and 136:2).

Enns states:

I suppose one could argue the Psalmists were just writing 'poetry' and didn't really intend to be taken literally. On the other hand, the point of the comparison is to exalt Yahweh by way of contrast. For the comparison to have any real punch, both entities must be presumed to be real. For example, we may tell our children something like, 'Don't be afraid of the dark. God is greater than the Boogey Man.' Of course, adults who say this know that the Boogey Man is not real, but they know that their children believe he is real . . . This is what the Psalms are doing as well."¹²

Enns' conclusion is very troubling because it means that God speaks to the Israelites as though other gods actually exist when He knows in fact they don't. Wouldn't it make more sense for God to simply tell the Israelites the truth - there are no other gods (as other passages of Scripture explicitly say)?

Is God a liar?

Instead, Enns would rather have us believe that God thought something like the following: "Since they think other gods exist, I will act like that's true, but then tell them I am greater than these other gods." This would mean that God actually reveals things in His inspired word that He knows are not true. Indeed, it would mean that God inspired biblical authors to say contradictory things.

Enns relates:

We may not believe that multiple gods ever existed, but ancient Near Eastern people did. This is the religious world within which God called Israel to be his people. When God called Israel, he began leading them into a full knowledge of who he is, but he started where they were. We should not be surprised, therefore, when we see the Old Testament describe God as greater than the gods of the surrounding nations.¹³

¹² Enns, *Inspiration*, 99.

¹³ Enns, *Inspiration*, 98.

Enns amplifies this assertion:

At this point in the progress of redemption, however, the gods of the surrounding nations are treated as real [by God]. God shows his absolute supremacy over them by declaring not that ‘they don’t exist’ but that ‘they cannot stand up against me—look what I did in Egypt.’¹⁴

It is true that God reveals greater and fuller truth over the course of biblical history. But it is entirely another thing to claim God acts and speaks as though something is true (other gods exist) that He will later reveal to be false.

In speaking of the Israelites as they came out of Egypt, Enns posits:

What would have spoken to these Israelites—what would have met them where they were—was not a declaration of monotheism (belief that only one God exists), out of the blue. Their ears would not have been prepared to hear that.¹⁵

Enns suggests that God withholds the truth of monotheism from the Israelites since they weren’t ready to hear that, and instead acted as though their polytheistic beliefs were true, but they just needed to worship the right one out of the pantheon of gods. Enns’ teachings are very troubling in that they make God a liar. To the contrary - “Let God be true and every man a liar” (Romans 3:4) and, indeed, “God is not a man that he should lie” (Numbers 23:19).

Christians must be on guard

Enns’ teachings are representative of some scholars today who are teaching at evangelical institutions, or whose books are being used at the same, but whose teachings subtly undermine the historic affirmations of the church concerning our inspired and inerrant Bible. Due to Enns’ controversial views, he was ultimately dismissed from his position at Westminster Seminary, but his teachings continue to have a dangerous influence among evangelicals.

It is certainly true that Christians attending colleges and seminaries need to be exposed to various forms of false teachings so that they can ably provide an answer for the hope they have in Christ (1 Peter 3:15). But what is troubling is that many who take the name evangelical are not merely studying Enns’ teachings, but are adopting them as though they are in accord with scriptural truth. They are, in fact, dangerous deceptions undermining trust in God’s precious Word.

¹⁴ Enns, *Inspiration*, 102.

¹⁵ Enns, *Inspiration*, 101.

SPIRITISM AND THE WITCH OF ENDOR

by Roy E. Knuteson, Ph.D.

One of the oldest forms of religious counterfeits is called Spiritism. It is the belief that the spirits of the dead have the capacity to communicate with people here on earth. This experience is also known as "necromancy". Spiritism's roots go back thousands of years to ancient Egypt. Just over a hundred years ago it experienced a renaissance, and it has grown into the present-day spiritist movement. Necromancy is accomplished through "witches" or "mediums" who claim to act as intermediaries between the material world and the spiritual world. Usually they also claim to have a personal spirit-guide who puts them in contact with the spirit of the departed. The supposed meetings between the dead and the living are called "Seances".

The Séance

Dennis Wheatley describes a typical séance:

"The lights in the room are dimmed, the medium goes into a trance and becomes possessed. That is to say, her spirit leaves her body, which is taken over by another. . . the main object of the operation is for members of the audience either to ask the spirit, who is presumed to be possessing her, about the future, or to secure news, either directly or through the possessing spirit, of people dear to them who are dead". (Dennis Wheatley, *The Devil And All His Works*, New York: American Heritage Press. 1971, pp. 71, 72).

What is it that causes people to believe they can contact the spirit world? Undoubtedly there is a strong desire to contact a departed loved one by whatever means. Then too, the physical phenomena that usually accompany these meetings are convincing proofs to them that what they are experiencing is real. Spiritualists say there are six types of séances: "Passivity, vocal reality, trumpet revelation, lights, transfiguration, and levitation. In one sitting, several of these might be witnessed" (William Peterson, *Those Curious New Cults*, New Canaan, CN. Keats Publishing Company. 1975, p. 63).

Obviously, there are many fraudulent practices by these mediums. Former spiritists have testified that most of the things that occur during a séance can be rationally explained as a deception. These

include trumpet speaking, spirit raps, automatic writing, table tilting and spirit photography. Spiritists of the past and present, however, claim that the experience of Saul in 1 Samuel 28 gives biblical support for their practice of necromancy. Is this true?

Saul's Experience

In a summary review of this unusual experience of Saul we learn:

1. It was prompted by Saul's fear of an impending invasion by the Philistine army (1 Samuel 28:4-5).
2. The prophet Samuel was dead, and the Lord did not provide an answer to Saul's dilemma even though he sought it by the biblical means of "dreams or Urim or a prophet" (28:6).
3. Although Saul had expelled almost all of the mediums from the land (28:3), in desperation he demanded the services of a remaining one located in nearby Endor. (28:7).
4. Disguised and accompanied by two men, Saul promised the medium immunity from death if she would bring up Samuel from the dead. (28:10-11).
5. Suddenly, Samuel was reported by the witch to have appeared first as a spirit-being coming out of the ground and then as an old man dressed in a prophet's robe (28:13,14). Apparently, Samuel looked as he did before he died in order for Saul to recognize him and announce that indeed Samuel had appeared as requested.
6. Speaking directly to Saul, Samuel claimed that he was "disturbed for being brought up" (28:15), and then he announced that the Lord would hand over Saul and Israel to the Philistines because of Saul's disobedience (28:16-19).
7. Saul's response to this revelation was one of fear and physical weakness as he prostrated himself before Samuel (28:20), who then disappeared. Meanwhile, Saul and his men ate a meal prepared by the witch before they returned to Gilboa.

Without question, this is a major Old Testament interpretive problem which runs contrary to many other scriptures and seems to give some credence to anyone who practices necromancy.

Theories of Explanation

There are three basic theories of explanation of this admittedly difficult passage of scripture. The first is that the whole affair is one of deception. Like the spiritists of today there was much trickery so that what appears is not real. Almost all who have claimed to have contact with departed spirits are frauds as witnessed by former necromancers and by those who have carefully investigated séance meetings. In fact, they claim it is all deception, both then and now.

A more accepted explanation is that Satan is capable of producing illusionary images and can communicate with the dead. Therefore, what sounded like an authentic message from God was actually a Satanic counterfeit. According to this theory the witch of Endor expected a contact with a demon posing as Samuel. This is something she had apparently done on other occasions with other spirit-beings. She had a reputation for doing this. However, no spirit-being could have given such a clear message of doom as reported in verse 17. Mediums do not have access to the dead. Instead, they can communicate with demons who may pose as persons who have died.

A third explanation is based on the literal or normal method of interpreting scripture.

We can conclude that there is no basis for necromancy in the Bible. Instead, the Word of God absolutely forbids anyone delving into the realm of the spirits with prohibitions such as these:

Leviticus 19: 31: “Do not turn to mediums or seek out spirits, for you will be defiled by them”.

Leviticus 20:6: “I will set my face against the person who turns to mediums and to spirits to prostitute himself to follow them”.

Leviticus 20:27: “A man or woman who is a medium or spiritist you must put to death”.

Deuteronomy 18:10-12: “Let no one be found among you who consults the dead”.

The Bible plainly states that Samuel actually appeared to Saul and to the Witch. Apparently the woman was expecting contact with a demon, but to her amazement and terror (V:12) God actually permitted Samuel to appear and give the message of doom to Saul. They carried on a conversation which included Samuel's complaint of being “disturbed by being brought up”. The Bible does not say, in so many words, that the Witch “brought up Samuel” from the realm

of the dead, but the normal reading of the text certainly gives the impression that she could and did bring him up.

Where Samuel was prior to his appearance is not revealed. It was undoubtedly the realm of the Old Testament righteous dead as revealed by Jesus in the story of the rich man and Lazarus and their designated places of abode after death (Luke 16:19-31). According to Daniel 12:2, Old Testament believers will not receive their resurrected bodies until the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. In the meantime God has prepared an intermediate body for all the righteous as they await the return of the Savior. (See 2 Cor. 5:1-5).

Samuel's complaint of having to return to earth from the place of comfort and blessing is understandable. Behind the scenes we know that it was God who permitted all of this to transpire in order to make one last prophecy to Israel and Saul regarding the impending invasion of Israel by the Philistines and also to announce the death of Saul and his sons the very next day (28:18-19).

Isaiah's timeless advice is a fitting conclusion to this study of Spiritism and the Witch of Endor: "When men tell you to consult mediums and spiritists who whisper and mutter, should not a people inquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living?" (Isaiah 8:19).

All scripture quotations are from New International Version of the Bible.

THE “INSPIRED VERSION”— INSPIRED BY WHOM?

By William McKeever

A commendable student of the Bible tries hard to understand a text in the way the author meant his words to be understood. His desire is to comprehend with as much precision as possible, the intent of the author. False teachers have no such intentions. Instead, they want to read into a passage ideas they feel already support their currently held positions. However, only the worst of false teachers would dare to be so bold as to actually change the verse or verses in order to promote their heretical viewpoints. Joseph Smith certainly falls into the latter category.

Joseph Smith’s 1833 version of the Bible has also been called the “Inspired Version.” Mormon apologists don’t even try to hide the fact that Smith needed neither manuscripts to be translated from, nor knowledge of the languages spoken by the ancient writers themselves. For many proponents of Smith, it is enough that he was inspired of God and was enabled with modern revelation to make the necessary “corrections” to the Bible. BYU Professor Robert L. Millet stated,

“The Prophet translated the King James Bible by the same means he translated the Book of Mormon—through revelation. His knowledge of Hebrew or Greek or his acquaintance with ancient documents was no more essential in making the JST than a previous knowledge of Reformed Egyptian or an access to more primitive Nephite records was essential to the translation of the Book of Mormon” (The Joseph Smith Translation: The Restoration of Plain and Precious Things, pp.26–27).

On October 15, 1843, Joseph Smith delivered a sermon in which he declared, “I believe the Bible as it read when it came from the pen of the original writers. Ignorant translators, careless transcribers, or designing and corrupt priests have committed many errors” (History of the Church 6:57). As we can see, he breaks down his complaint into three categories, 1) ignorant translators, 2) careless transcribers, and 3) corrupt priests. Let us briefly examine this claim.

Ignorant translators

Christians will readily agree that translators are fallible humans and prone to make mistakes, but to assume that the people behind every Bible translation available during Smith's day were ignorant or even unqualified overall, is quite a stretch. Though there are exceptions, in many cases our English Bibles were translated by way of committees. In other words, several scholars worked together to translate and critique each other's work in an effort to produce a translation that most accurately reflects the meaning behind the words used by the original writers.

This is certainly true of the King James Version, considered to be the official version of the LDS Church. In his book, *The Men Behind the King James Version*, author Gutavus S. Paine examines the education and Christian devotion of the men who "by his majesty's special command," produced a translation "out of the original tongues with the former translations diligently compared and revised" (Title page). They were hardly ignorant, nor do we find evidence to suggest that they were motivated by anything other than a desire to produce a precise translation. In fact, 400 years after it was first introduced, the Kings James Version is still considered a masterpiece, and is rightfully credited as the source used by God to bring countless millions unto Himself.

Careless transcribers

Prior to the printing press, manuscripts had to be painstakingly copied by hand. Dr. Neil R. Lightfoot, in his book *How We Got the Bible*, readily acknowledges that "mistakes of the hand, eyes, and ear are of frequent occurrence in manuscripts," but he goes on to state that they "usually pose no problem because they are so easy to pick out" (p.88). Lightfoot explains:

"Errors of omission and addition are common in all the manuscripts. Words sometimes are omitted by a copyist for no apparent reason, simply an unintentional omission. More often, however, omissions are due to the similar appearance of words at a corresponding point several lines above or below in the manuscript. The scribe's eye might skip, for example, from the end of line 6 to a similar word at the end of line 10. A scribe might add to his copy in the same way. He may inadvertently transcribe a word twice in succession, or repeat a letter twice, or write a letter once when it should have been written twice. Not a few times the scribe may misunderstand the passage due to improper division of the words, especially if the scribe

is unskilled in the language... But in all matters of this kind, the textual critic, by comparison of the many manuscripts, can detect and explain these errors without hesitation” (p.89. Emphasis mine).

Lightfoot admits that manuscripts do include what appear to be intentional alterations, but he states,

“we ought not think these insertions were made by dishonest scribes who simply wanted to tamper with the text. Almost always the intention of the scribe is good and he wants only to ‘correct’ what appears to be an error in the text. So if a word seems improperly spelled, or a Greek verb does not have the proper ending, or a form does not correspond with the classical idiom, then the scribe feels it is his duty to improve the text he is copying” (p.90).

Designing or corrupt priests

A designing person is one who crafts a plan whether for good or ill. Since Smith also used the word corrupt, it seems intentional that this label is to be understood in a negative and sinister way. If Smith’s claim had any validity it would be a conspiracy of monumental proportions. For this conspiracy to be successful, the powers behind these “corrupt priests” would have to collect and destroy any and all handwritten manuscripts that did not contain the same alterations (or at least a great majority of them). Since the New Testament was being hand-copied in areas all over the known world where Christianity was having an influence, getting rid of the extant documents that did not conform to current alterations would be impossible.

Though it is true that variants (or differences) can be found among the over 5,000 New Testament manuscripts available today, we don’t see a pattern of unique Mormon doctrines being left out. In other words, you won’t find ancient Old or New Testament documents discussing things like a heavenly mother, or eight-year-old deacons, or the necessity of marriage in order to receive the Mormon version of exaltation. To insist as the LDS Church does that these or any other such “precious truth” was purposely removed from the text is of course, an argument from silence based on no proof whatsoever.

Conclusion

The irony in Smith’s accusation, is that he seems to be describing himself! When he took it upon himself to revise the Bible in 1830

he had no expertise in ancient languages. Would this not make him an “ignorant translator?” And if we find a pattern of Smith making alterations that conflicted with ancient texts, while at the same time supporting his presently held views, would that not also make him both designing and corrupt?

Unfortunately, most Mormons will never consider the obvious truth that it was their founding prophet who was guilty of tampering with God’s Word. If the Joseph Smith “translation” was indeed an “Inspired Version,” it seems apparent that this inspiration did not begin with God, but was rather an attempt by Smith to deceive those whose admiration for him far exceeded their ability to discern.

Editor’s note:

Bill McKeever is the president of Mormonism Research Ministries (MRM) and author of numerous books on Mormonism. The website is mrm.org.

ALL ABOUT THE KORAN

by Caroline Alexander

The Koran:

(Arabic, *Quran* = recital or reading)

Koran = holy book for all Muslims: final authority

- believed to be revelation from Allah to Mohammed
- Mohammed transferred divine knowledge into writing

Koran = Eternal Book (Muslim belief)

Quote: “If all the trees of the earth were pens, and the seas, replenished by seven more seas, were ink, the words of God could not be finished still.”

What is the Koran in the Eyes of a Muslim?

Koran = Arabic transcription of a heavenly form or archetype, referred to as the “eternal book,” “imperishable tablet,” or “Mother of the Book,” which God unveiled through the Archangel Gabriel to various prophets on earth whenever needed to guide humanity.

Books revealed earlier are considered by some Muslims to be superseded by the Koran, whose purpose is to correct human imperfections that crept into previous books.

- other revealed books respected as legitimate by all Muslims, but
- Koran = final, perfect transmission of the one heavenly book
- presents itself entirely as direct words of God (not narrative or doctrinal like Jewish or Christian Scriptures)

Reflection of Prominent Muslim Scholar:

The fact that the Koran represents the direct communication of God may help to explain its difficult, seemingly jumbled text,

almost impenetrable at times, as if “the language of mortal man were, under the formidable pressure of the Heavenly Word, broken into 1,000 fragments.

Beginning of Koran:

- seen as a divine revelation
- *Ramadan* - (9th month of Islamic calendar): voice called to Mohammed, “Recite!”
- “In the name of thy Lord the Creator, who created mankind from a clot of blood, recite!” (according to Islamic history)
- Mohammed disturbed; afraid of possession by evil spirit
- revelations extended over about 22 years (began 610 A.D.)
- early revelations to Mohammed by angel Gabriel became Koran
- earlier revelations received in trance state: “prophet” groaned, cried out, shivered
- above manifestations accompanied by headaches, severe muscular tension
- adjustment brought deep absorption
- assurance received by cousin of Khadija (Mohammed’s wife)
- Mohammed’s revelations likened to those God allowed Moses and prophets to experience
- Mohammed must submit
- continued revelations gathered together through oral tradition
- companions committed revelations to memory
- eventually written down on leaves, shards of pottery, shoulder blades of camels (tradition)
- Mohammed dictated to secretaries in Medina
- revelations later became *Koran* (“recite”)

Alternate Version:

- no writing traced to Mohammed
- no writing collected during Mohammed's lifetime
- original hearers thinning: organized effort made to write down sayings: became *Koran* ("reading" or "recitation")
- completed about 650 A.D.
- Koran compiled after Mohammed's death
- compiled from extant notes from hearers and oral tradition
- faithful Muslim:
Koran = very words of Allah in strictest literal sense;
Koran = exact transcript of heavenly book brought down to Mohammed by angel Gabriel

Mohammed's View of Koran:

- *the* miracle: not a product of his own devices
- sent down from heaven by angel Gabriel

Structure of Koran:

- relatively short: (around 400 pages) - English translation
- little less than New Testament
- *114 suras* (chapters) arranged in order of length rather than in
- chronological order of transmission
- short introductory prayer: *al-Fatiha* ("The Opening")
- longest sura (285 verses)
- shortest suras (3-6 verses) at end
- suras composed of verses called *ayats* ("signs" or "proofs")

Suras have 4 sections each:

1. title

2. *basmalah* or prayer: "In the name of God, the merciful and compassionate"

3. mention of the location where the sura was revealed
(Mecca or Medina)

4. *fawatih* letters - believed to have some hidden meaning

- end *suras* - first revelations Mohammed received
- chronological development seen in Koran from back to front

First Sura = Short Prayer:

In the Name of God, the Compassionate,
the Merciful.

(All suras begin like this)

Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds!

The Compassionate, the Merciful!

King on the Day of Reckoning!

Thee *only* do we worship, and to Thee
do we cry for help.

Guide Thou us on the straight path,
the path of those to whom Thou hast
been gracious;

with whom Thou art not angry, and
who go not astray.

Koran Contains Two Key Prayers of Islam:

Al-Fatiha and Surat al-Ikhlās (“Chapter of Sincerity”)

- “Chapter of Sincerity = “Say God is One, the Eternal God. He begets none*, nor is begotten, and none is like Him.”

*Allah is not the God of the Bible; Jesus is not God’s Son!

Koranic Accounts Similar to Jewish and Christian Scriptures:

- Example: annunciation of angel to Mary informing her that she will bear a child without “knowing” a man (Sura 19:16-21)
- Koran written 500-600 years after New Testament: 75% of Koran from Bible (observation of an Arabic-speaking Christian)

Arabic Koran:

Contains 99 principal names of Allah - most describing compassionate qualities:

Sabur — patient

Wadud — loving

Hakim — wise

Haqq — truth or reality

Nur — light

Ghaffas — forgiver

Rahman — compassionate (most frequently)

Rahim — merciful

What Does the Koran Say About Itself?

It descended on the Night of Power, (sura 97:1)

that blessed night, (sura 44:2)

in the month of *Ramadan*. (sura 2:185)

The Word of God recorded in the Original Book, (sura 43:4)

has been revealed in portions. (sura 17:106)

Its verses stem from the Wise One (sura 11:1)

and constitute a perfect revelation that clarifies difficult issues.

(sura 5:101)

It does not only represent sure knowledge but also a warning,

(sura 69:51)

and a reminder to the world. (sura 68:62)

Its verses are both figurative and explicit, (sura 3:17)

but essentially it is a plain sign (sura 18:1)

and a clear indicator to the heart of the believer. (sura 3:49)

It is a revelation that has a conclusive message. (sura 86:13)

The *Qur'an* is a glorious scripture (sura 50:1)

that comprises all the secrets of heaven and earth (sura 27:75).

Its coming was foretold by earlier scriptures which it

confirms and whose truth it safeguards. (sura 3:3)

Its lucid good news (sura 17:9) brings healing to the faithful

and ruin to the wicked. (sura 17:82)

The faithful accept it as all from God, but its revelation

increases the unbelief and rebellion of many who treat it

as a lie.(sura 74:33-34)

It is absolutely free from error, (sura 41:42) and
whosoever rejects it will be lost. (sura 3:4)

It is above all the guarantee of the friendship of God:

“Lo, my Protecting Friend is Allah, who revealeth the Scripture.
He befriendeth the righteous.” (sura 7:196)

Koran:

- occupies place of honor among all Muslims
- canon of faith for all Muslims
- textbook of civil law & shaper of Islam’s culture & code of honor
- held as *final* authority of Islam
- given highest reverence by Muslims:
“They dare not touch it without first being washed and purified. They read it with the greatest care and respect never holding it below their waist.”
- viewed as fulfillment of Old and New Testaments
- all part of original revelation
- acknowledges Jews and Christians as fellow
“People of the Book”
- *the Book* not the Bible
- Koran = heavenly text written by God: *only perfect copy*

According to the Koran:

- God mercifully revealed contents of that book from time to time through words of previous Biblical prophets and messengers
- also revealed to other obscure figures not mentioned in Bible
- receivers of revelation (Jews & Christians) either consciously or inadvertently corrupted original text, or seriously misinterpreted it

Koran:

- not new version of Bible
- “revelation” correcting errors of Hebrew and Christian Scriptures
- seen as pure revelation: Mohammed could not read or write
- Koran = perfect text
- Islam = perfect religion

Koran:

- style somewhat disconcerting
- full of repetitions
- revelations (Mohammed’s) heard, recited, memorized by converts
- no sura focuses on a single theme
- each sura takes title from single word
- suras organized from longest to shortest
- no chronological organization - God is speaking: His words are timeless
- longer texts deal with matters of behavior, organization
- shorter texts more “prophetic” (announce the need to submit)
- no illustrations: idolatry (*shirk*) worst sin

Arrangement of Koran:

- verses not arranged in chronological order, but in order of topic,
- relative length of passages among other concerns
- verses appearing *late* in book may have been received earlier

Problem with Koranic Authority:

- interpretation of Koran, Islam's sacred book, major problem causing current political conflicts with West
- all Muslims plagued by crippling crisis of authority
- *Koran*: envisioned single Muslim community (umma)
- *Reality*: unresolved tension between religious authority and Islamic governments
 - *ulema – “learned ones”; guardian, interpreters of sharia law
- Islam: great medieval civilization - Koranic scholars applied God's words to changed historical circumstances
- Fatwas (opinions) settled disputes
- *Current Islamic states*: authoritative religious voices do not command widespread respect
- any Muslim with an agenda cites Koranic support
- most dangerous and obvious example: Osama bin Laden

Moderate Koranic Interpreters:

- cite verses showing Allah created diverse peoples, cultures
- intended world would remain pluralistic in religion
- above caused some Middle Easterners to condemn terrorist acts
- judge suicide bombing contrary to Koran

Koran and Bible: Similarities:

- both define rules for prayer, religious rituals
- both establish norms governing marriage, divorce, relations between men and women; way to raise righteous children
- both trace a common lineage back to Abraham (neither Jew or Christian), to Adam himself
- both profess faith in a single God, creator, sustainer of world
- both call humankind to repentance, obedience, purity of life

- both warn of God's punishment, final judgement of world
- both picture hell, paradise in hereafter
- both assert their own divine authority
- both mention Abraham, Moses, David, John the Baptist, Jesus, Virgin Mary*
 - *appears much more often in Koran than in New Testament; only woman mentioned in Koran by name
- Koranic stories differ radically from Biblical stories
- Koran: all previous prophets Muslim
- Abraham (*Ibrahim*) recognized as first Muslim: chose to surrender to Allah rather than accept religion of his father (not mentioned in Bible)
- Abraham's building of *Kaaba* (Islam's holiest shrine) not in Bible
- Koranic importance of Abraham: Arab genealogy, Mohammed's prophethood traced back through Ishmael, son of Hagar and Abraham

Koranic Moses:

looks much like biblical counterpart

- confronts pharaoh
- works miracle
- ascends desert mountain to receive God's commandments

Koran:

- no mention of Passover rituals
- Sabbath-keeping commandment absent (most important for Jews)
- obedience to parents stressed repeated
- disobedience required towards *polytheistic* parents

Koranic Jesus:

(*Isa*) - looks a lot like Jesus

- prophet rejected by own people (Meccans)
- preaches word of God
- works miracles
- persecuted
- difference: foretells successor: Mohammed

Koran:

- rejects Christian claim Jesus is Son of God: blasphemy
- dismisses Trinity: polytheistic
- crucifixion alluded to
- Koran: Jesus mysteriously does not die
- Jesus rescued by Allah to heaven
- Last-day descent: witness for community of believers at Final Judgement

Salient Differences between Koran and Bible:

- Scriptures = biblical text as words of divinely inspired human authors (Jews, Christians)
- Koran: "*The Recitation*" = eternal words of Allah himself
- Mohammed = conduit for God's words, not composer

Koran not Bible of Muslims:

- Mohammed heard God in *Arabic*
- translations of Koran considered mere "*interpretations*" of language of God's original revelation

Koran:

- likened to oral Torah first revealed to Moses, later written down
- Gospel terminology: Koran corresponds to Christ Himself:
- *Logos*: eternal Word of the Father
- Christ = Word made flesh
- Koran = word made book

Koranic View of Adam and Eve:

- holds both Adam and Eve *equally* responsible for fall
- views creation of man, woman as creation of a *single soul* not two separate acts

Used by permission from Caroline Alexander. She is a longtime private researcher and writer on counter-cult and apologetics issues. For a complete list of her research articles, please contact RAS.org

QUIZ: DENOMINATIONS/BACKGROUNDS

1. Anglicans grew out of a struggle with Rome over divorce re:
 a. Richard the Lion-Hearted
 b. King George III
 c. Queen Victoria
 d. Henry the VIII

2. He asserted the “divine right of kings”, later beheaded:
 a. Queen Elizabeth
 b. James I
 c. Charles II
 d. George III

3. Uses the acrostic “TULIP” in defining its doctrinal positions:
 a. Methodists
 b. Moravians
 c. Lutherans
 d. Presbyterians

4. Preservation of the bones of the saints is practiced by
 a. Roman Catholics
 b. Christian Science
 c. Freemasons
 d. Disciples of Christ

5. Uses icons in their worship experience:
 a. Shiite Muslims
 b. Greek Orthodox
 c. Hassidic Jews
 d. Missouri Synod/Lutherans

6. Anabaptists were persecuted by Lutherans and Catholics alike because
 a. they lived like gypsies
 b. they were non-alcoholics
 c. they practiced believers’ baptism
 d. they rejected the Old Testament scriptures

7. Ulrich Zwingli taught this view of the Lord's Supper:
 ___ a. transubstantiation
 ___ b. solely symbolism
 ___ c. consubstantiation
 ___ d. merely a Jewish rite
8. A unique "second blessing" after conversion is taught by
 ___ a. Pentecostals
 ___ b. Southern Baptists
 ___ c. Evangelical Free Church
 ___ d. Seventh Day Adventists
9. Amish belief systems are historically related to
 ___ a. Congregationalism
 ___ b. Moravians
 ___ c. Mennonites
 ___ d. Episcopalians
10. Jonathan Edwards was a
 ___ a. Nazarene
 ___ b. Congregationalist
 ___ c. Presbyterian
 ___ d. Methodist

Answers:

1. (d); 2. (c); 3. (c); 4. (d); 5. (a); 6. (b); 7. (b); 8. (a); 9. (c); 10. (b)

Personal Notes on the Articles:

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