

THE BIBLE: IS IT OR ISN'T IT GOD'S WORD?

In the Garden of Eden, satan (I refuse to capitalize his name) came to Eve in order to ask one question. In effect, it is the same question which he asks again and again down through the generations of mankind. The question is this: "Hath God said?" It is a question to promote unbelief. It is a question specifically designed NOT to increase faith. It would remove the certainty which the listener has in the Word of God. Today, satan and his agents really ask the same old question. We are asked to decide whether THIS PART of Scripture is really God's Word or whether THAT PART is, or whether the writer only thought it was. In other words all questions relating to the Word of God really come down to the question, "Hath GOD said?" If the whole Bible as we know it, that is the 66 canonical books, are truly the inerrant and inspired Word of God, then we have no problem. But, if Scripture only contains God's Word, then we shall have endless trouble in trying to establish the criteria by which certain people, theologians, I presume, would be able to tell us authoritatively just which portions of the Bible are, and which are not, the Word of God. Before we make any decision, it will be good for us to do the following. Let us see

1. What Jesus thought of and how He used "The Scriptures".
2. Likewise for the Apostles.
3. What did the early Christian Church confess vis a vis "The Scriptures".
4. What did the Reformers do in this matter?
5. How about modern day theologians, in particular, Dr. Paul Bretscher?

I

In Matt. 21:42, Jesus is speaking to the leaders of Judaism, the chief priests and the elders concerning His Messiahship. As the argumentation progresses, "λέγει αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς· οὐδέποτε ἀνέγνωτε ἐν ταῖς γραφαῖς..." and He quotes Ps. 118:22-23, "The stone which the builders refused is become the headstone of the corner, etc." The point which I want to make is that in the closing days of His life, our blessed Savior quotes from that which He calls the Scriptures. He expects that His listeners know what He is talking about. He speaks of those "Scriptures" as being authoritative. The problem with His listeners was not that they did not know the Scriptures. No, their problem was that they did not want to accept

THAT PORTION OF SCRIPTURE as authoritative and, in this case, as speaking of Jesus as the Christ. This is an important point (concerning) which I would like my hearers to make special note.

In Matt. 22:29 we read that after the chief priests and the Pharisees and the Herodians had failed in their attempt to discredit Jesus, the Sadducees tried their luck by attacking the resurrection from the dead. *ἀποκριθεὶς δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· πλανᾶσθε μὴ εἰδότες τὰς γραφὰς, μὴ δὲ τὴν δύναμιν τοῦ θεοῦ... (v. 31) οὐκ ἀνέγνωτε τὸ ῥᾶθὲν ὁμῖν ὑπὸ τῶν θεῶν λέγοντος.* And here Jesus quotes Ex. 3:6 "I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob." The point which our Savior makes here is that the Sadducees' argument re the woman who had 7 husbands is indeed a sophomoric one, since they did not understand "THE SCRIPTURES". Jesus speaks of the Scriptures as a book or series of writings which were known to everybody. He speaks of them as authoritative ---- even in the matter of marriage and life after death. And, equally important, he speaks of the passage which He quotes, not as the opinion of Moses on the matter under discussion, but as "That which was spoken of God" THUS, the "Scriptures" are not man's but God's Word. This is an important point. Please tuck it away in your mind.

Matt. 22:43 Here Jesus is again confronted by the Pharisees. In meeting their attack, *(Ἰησοῦς) λέγει αὐτοῖς· πῶς οὖν Δαυὶδ ἐν πνεύματι κλεῖτ αὐτὸν κύριον λέγων... " Jesus quotes from the Scriptures i.e. Ps. 110:1 and adds the significant remark that David, in writing this quoted portion of the Scriptures, is speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. We conclude from the Savior's remark that the Scriptures are inspired. However, this conclusion is not limited to this passage alone. There ARE more.*

Matt. 26:54 & 56 After Peter tried to protect Jesus with the sword, the Lord speaks both to him and to the mob assembled, *"πῶς οὖν πληρωθῶσιν αἱ γραφαὶ ὅτι οὕτως δεῖ γενέσθαι;... τούτο δὲ ὅλον γέγονεν ἵνα πληρωθῶσιν αἱ γραφαὶ τῶν προφητῶν."* Jesus speaks of the writings of the prophets as part of the "Scriptures". His statement clearly indicates

that they did not just make educated guesses concerning the future, but that they wrote things which must be fulfilled. Thus, their writings were not just some personal ruminations, but "Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." II Pet. 1:21 Jesus quotes the prophets of Scripture as authoritative. They wrote God's Word, not their own, yet they wrote in their own style.

Mk. 14:49 This is the companion passage to the one above. Jesus addresses the mob and says, "Καθ' ἡμέραν ἤκην πρὸς ὑμᾶς ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ διδασκῶν καὶ οὐκ ἐκρατήσατέ με. ἀλλ' ἵνα πληρωθῶσιν αἱ γραφαί." "In this inspired quote of the Savior, He speaks of the Scriptures as a class, and not of a particular portion. The point is, the Scriptures were known. They testified of Jesus (but not only of Him, as we shall see later.)

Luke 4:21 ----referring to 4:18 and fulfillment of Is. 61:1-2. "ἤρξατο δὲ λέγει πρὸς αὐτοὺς ὅτι σήμερον πεπλήρωται ἡ γραφή αὕτη ἐν τοῖς ὠσίν ὑμῶν. This passage in Isaiah is also quoted as part of the Scripture. Although those words speaking of coming Judgment are not mentioned here by the Savior, yet they cannot be excluded from this passage. We should remember this point, since some deny the verbal inspiration of certain so-called imprecatory portions of the Psalms.

Luke 24:27 Jesus is speaking to the 2 disciples on the way to Emmaus, "καὶ ἀρξάμενος ἀπὸ Μωϋσέως καὶ ἀπὸ πάντων τῶν προφητῶν διημήνευσεν αὐτοῖς ἐν πάσαις ταῖς γραφαῖς τὰ περὶ ἑαυτοῦ." "For the purpose of this paper, this is an extremely important passage.

When Jesus expounds that whole Pentateuch (Moses) and the Prophets, He speaks only of those things which deal with Himself, implying that the Scriptures speak of many other things, but that what He quoted now was germane to the subject under discussion, i.e. the exinanition of the Messiah and His subsequent glorification. If, as some falsely claim, the Scripture is to mean only those portions of the Bible which pertain to Christ and salvation, then our Savior is prolix and redundant when He speaks of those things in the Pentateuch and all the Prophets which speak concerning Himself. (διημήνευω — To unfold the meaning of

what is said, expound, explain.)

Luke 24:32 "οὐχὶ ἡ καρδία ἡμῶν καιομένη ἦν ἐν ἡμῖν, ὡς ἐλάλει ἡμῖν ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ, ὡς διήνοιγεν ἡμῖν τὰς γραφάς; (ὄι-αν-οίγω - to open the sense of Scripture, to explain them.) Yet another example of the fact that "The Scriptures" were a well known entity.

Luke 24:44-45, "εἶπεν δὲ πρὸς αὐτοὺς· οὗτοι οἱ λόγοι μου, οὓς ἐλάλησα πρὸς ὑμᾶς ἐστὶ ὧν σὺν ὑμῖν, ὅτι δεῖ πληρωθῆναι πάντα τὰ γεγραμμένα ἐν τῷ νόμῳ Μωϋσέως καὶ τοῖς προφητοῖς καὶ ψαλμοῖς περὶ ἐμοῦ. τότε διήνοιξεν αὐτῶν τὸν νοῦν τοῦ συνιέναι τὰς γραφάς." (ὄι-αν-οίγω - to open thoroughly: συνίημι - to bring together, to set or join together in the mind, to understand.) Again in this passage, we see that if Scripture were only the Gospel, then Jesus' words here would be neoplastic, redundant. However, there were and are parts of the Scripture, the Bible, which are not, strictly speaking, Gospel. These treat of other matters and are still just as much God's Word as the Gospel. Jesus is not explaining those other parts here but limits Himself to those portions in the Pentateuch, Prophets and Psalms which are Messianic.

John 2:22 "ὅτε οὖν ἠγέρθη ἐκ νεκρῶν, ἐμνήσθησαν οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ ὅτι τοῦτο εἶπεν, καὶ ἐπίστευσαν τῇ γραφῇ καὶ τῷ λόγῳ ὃν εἶπεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς." After driving the moneychangers from the temple, and after speaking of his own resurrection, Jesus disciples were led, by their faith in Jesus, to believe also the Scriptures, i.e. the Bible. Here we see another important point. Our attitude toward the Scripture, the Bible, God's Word, will be in direct relation to our faith in Christ. The Scribes, Pharisees, etc. also had the Scriptures, but they did not believe them in toto because they had the attitude of unbelief toward Christ. Their view, their "Anshaung" of Scripture was faulty.

Jn. 5:39 "Ἔρευνάτε τὰς γραφάς, ὅτι ὑμεῖς δοκεῖτε ἐν αὐταῖς ζωὴν αἰώνιον εἶχειν." In this whole chapter of John, Jesus testifies to His divinity and Sonship. The trouble with His opponents was that they studied the Scripture and hoped to receive salvation from it, yet they did not accept it as authoritative and thus received only that which fit in with their mistaken presuppositions.

Thus, when the Bible speaks, it speaks with authority on the subject it treats of -- whether that be the divinity of the Christ, or on how the world was first formed!

John 5:45-47 "ἔστιν ὁ κατηγορῶν ὑμῶν Μωϋσῆς, εἰς ὃν ὑμεῖς ἐλπίζετε. εἰ γὰρ ἐπιστεύετε Μωϋσῆϊ, ἐπιστεύατε ἂν, ἐμοί. περὶ γὰρ ἐμοῦ ἐκεῖνος ἔγραψεν. εἰ δὲ τοῖς ἐκεῖνου γραμμασίην οὐ πιστεύετε, πῶς τοῖς ἐμοῖς ῥήμασι πιστεύετε;" (καταγγεῖν - to accuse.)

John 7:38 Jesus here quotes from Ezek.47:1-12, Zech.13:1, 14:8 and Prov.18:4 or should I say alludes to them. "ὁ πιστεύων εἰς ἐμὲ κώως εἴπε ἡ γραφή, ποταμοὶ ἐκ τῆς κοιλίας αὐτοῦ ῥεύσουσιν ὕδατος ζῶντος." John 7:42 οὐχ ἡ γραφή εἶπεν ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ σπέρματος Δαυὶδ καὶ ἀπὸ βεθλέεμ τῆς κώως ὅπου ἦν Δαυὶδ ἔρχεται ὁ χριστός;"  
Efr II Sam.7:12; Micah 5:1; Ps.89:3<sup>b</sup>-4 In these two portions of John 7,

we see how wide-ranging were our Savior's quotes of THE SCRIPTURE(S).

Surely, we should by this time be able to see that there was no area of the Scripture which Jesus did not regard as God's Word!

John 10:35 "καὶ οὐ δύναται λυθῆναι ἡ γραφή." ---quoted in reference to Ps.82:6. This passage has always been used as the sedes for the doctrine of verbal, plenary inspiration, correctly so, I might add. The words are so clear that no explanation is needed except to determine just what "The Scripture" is. That point will be addressed later in this paper.

John 13:18 "ἀλλ' ἵνα ἡ γραφή πληρωθῇ." The deeper we get into the Gospel the more we should be impressed with the reverent attitude of our Savior toward "The Scripture" even when that Scripture speaks of the betrayal of God's Messiah. This passage refers to Ps.41:9

John 19:24 "ἵνα ἡ γραφή πληρωθῇ" "Ps.22:19

:28 "ἵνα τελειωθῇ ἡ γραφή" Ps.69:21

36ff "ἔγενετο γὰρ, ταῦτα ἵνα ἡ γραφή πληρωθῇ, ὅσπου οὐ συντρέβησεται αὐτοῦ. καὶ πάλιν ἕτεροῦ γραφή λέγει - ὄψοντα εἰς ὃν ἔξεκέντησαν."

συντρίβω - To break: <sup>2</sup>ἐκκεντέω - to dig out, pierce---referring to Ex.12:46, Num.9:12; Ps.34:19-20; Zech.12:10

This concludes this portion whereby we come to see how our Lord Jesus dealt with these writings which He called, "The Scripture(s). We can easily see from the body of passages that Jesus respected this body of writings for what they were, not the opinions of Moses, David, Isaiah, but as they are in truth, the Word of God. We must remember that "the Scripture(s)" were the Bible to the O.T. believer and they were the Bible as a book, i.e. each portion, whether of the Pentateuch, i.e. the Law, the Psalms or the Prophets,---all were God's Word and not the words of man.

## II

But let us also take just a few(4) passages from other parts of the N.T. to see how the Apostles dealt with and felt about "the Scriptures"

We begin with Acts 1:20 <sup>1</sup>ἡγεγραπται γὰρ ἐν βίβλῳ ψαλμῶν· γεννηθήτω ἡ ἐπαυλις αὐτοῦ ἔρημος καὶ μὴ ἔστω ὁ κατοικῶν ἐν αὐτῇ, καὶ τὴν ἐπισκοπὴν αὐτοῦ λαβέτω ἕτερος. "

<sup>2</sup>ἡ ἐπαυλις - farm, a dwelling:: The 1st quote is from Ps.69:25 and the 2nd comes from Ps. 109:8. It is of prime importance for the point of this paper to take exceptional notice of Ps.69. This Psalm is quoted throughout the N.T. We note that it is a prophetic Passion Psalm. It is also imprecatory, so-called. Those, some of those, who would deny the verbal, plenary inspiration of the whole of the Bible do so on the grounds that imprecations are incongruous with the love of God and that therefore such imprecations cannot be the Word of God. This is an a priori assumption and is without Scriptural support, as it misses the point which differentiates between the Law and Gospel. Those who are God's enemies, those who reject the Son and despise His loving grace will most certainly be punished. Here in our passage, Iscariot is referred to by means of imprecation. Jn.15:25 refers to v.4; Jn 2:17 to v.9a; Rom.15:3 to v.10b; Rom.11:9ff to v.22-23. The 2nd quote is taken from Ps. 109:8 and also refers to Iscariot. On the matter of imprecation, we shall quote much from Luther later in this paper.

II Tim. 3:16-17 "πᾶσα γραφή θεοπνευστος καὶ ὠφέλιμος πρὸς διδασκαλίαν πρὸς ἔλεγχον, πρὸς ἐπανόρθωσιν, πρὸς παιδείαν τῆς ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ, ἵνα ἄριστος ᾦ ὁ τοῦ θεοῦ ἄνθρωπος, πρὸς πᾶν ἔργον ἀγαθὸν ἐξηρητισμένος."

ὠφέλιμος — Profitable c.dat. of advantage

ἡ διδασκαλία — Teaching, instruction, doctrine -- intellectual head knowledge

ὁ ἔλεγχος — reproof, censure, correction

ἡ ἐπανόρθωσις — restoration to an upright or right state; correction, improvement

ἔφαρτίσω — to complete, furnish thoroughly, finish

ἡ παιδεία — the whole training and education of children, relating to the cultivation of mind and morals, using now commandments and admonition, now reproof and punishment. The training of heart and soul. II. Whatever in adults also cultivates the soul esp. by correcting mistakes and curbing passions ---hence, instruction which aims at the increase of virtue.

This passage is extremely perspicuous as far as the authority and authorship of ALL Scripture is concerned. The only escape from the clarity of these words is to wickedly and perversely deny them. No amount of semantic legerdemain or scholastic gymnastics permits an interpretation which allows only for portions of the Bible to be verbally inspired.

II Pet. 1:20-21 "τοῦτο πρῶτον γινώσκοντες, ὅτι πᾶσα προφητεία γραφῆς ἰδίας ἐπιλύσεως οὐ γίνεται. οὐ γὰρ θελήματι ἀνθρώπου ἠνέχθη προφητεία ποτέ, ἀλλὰ ὑπὸ πνεύματος ἁγίου φερόμενοι ἔλαλησαν ἀπὸ θεοῦ ἄνθρωποι."

ἡ ἐπίλυσις — --A loosening, unloosening; metaph. ---interpretation

φέρω, ὄσω, ἠνεγκασί\* αὐτ. Ρωμ. — ἠνέχθη — to move inwardly of the mind; prompted

οὐ — — — ποτέ — NEVER

This passage makes it pretty clear, no, unmistakably clear that every portion of prophecy, even that which foretells of judgement and imprecation, is God's very own Word.

II Pet. 3:16 "ὡς καὶ ἐν πάσαις ἐπιστολαῖς λαλῶν ἐν αὐταῖς περὶ τούτων, ἐν αἷς ἐστὶν δυσνόητα τινα, ἃ οἱ ἄμαθεῖς καὶ ἀστηρίκτοι στρεβλοῦσιν ὡς καὶ τὰς λοιπὰς γραφὰς πρὸς τὴν ἰδίαν ἀπώλειαν."

II Pet.3:16

ἀμαθής-ες — unlearned

δοτήριος — unstable, unsteadfast

στρεβλῶν — torture, put to the rack, pervert, -- of one who twists language to a false sense.

λοιπῶν — the remaining, the rest OF ANY NUMBER OR CLASS.

Peter here includes portions of the NT together with the Scriptures. He is speaking specifically of Paul's Epistles, which were already being circulated in the early church. The "Schwerpunkt" of this passage for the purpose of this paper is the phrase that the "unlearned and unstable" even though they may be highly educated and even though they may be doctors and teachers in Biblical fields, are yet called "unlearned and unstable" if they wrest and twist the words of "the Scriptures". The Scriptures, be they Paul's Epistles, the Penteteuch, the Psalms or the Prophets are not man's words but God's. And thus, when we must choose between the wisdom which the world teaches and the Bible, that is, the Word of God, then we must always side with the Bible as the Book of the Scriptures. This was the stand of Christ and His apostles. We shall see that it is also the stand of the early church fathers. But before we go on to that, we must see a few allusions of the NT in regard to historical personages of "the Scriptures". The list is by no means exhaustive. It is presented only to give the reader the assurance that to Jesus and His holy Apostles, these personages were real, historical figures. This again confirms us in the knowledge that to Jesus and His disciples, the Word of the Scriptures was indeed the word of truth---even in matters of historical personages, creation, status of people in marriage, spread of death to all mankind, etc.

Luke 3:38 ---son of Adam, son of God

Rom.5:14 ----death came through Adam

I Cor.15:28 -as in Adam all die---

15:45 -the 1st man, Adam, became a living being

I Tim.2:13 --Adam was first formed, then Eve

Jude 14 ---- "Enoch, the 7th from Adam, prophesied about these men ---."



## III

## WHAT ARE "THE SCRIPTURES"?

The next question to which we must address ourselves is just what were those Scriptures which Jesus and His Apostles so frequently quoted in the N.T.?

The order of books in the Masoretic text, and thus in our modern Hebrew Bibles is as follows:

The Torah ---i.e. the Pentateuch

The Former Prophets: Joshua, Judges, I & II Samuel, and I & II Kings

The Latter Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the 12 minor prophets  
as in our English Bible)

The Writings (Kethubim or Hagiographa in Greek): Psalms, Proverbs, Job.

The Rolls (Megilloth) Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Eccles., Esther.

Historical: Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah and I & II Chronicles.

In the Septuagint (LXX) the following arrangement was used: The Pentateuch  
Books of History: Josh., Judges, Ruth, I & II Sam., and I & II Kings, I &  
II Chron., I & II Esdras (the first being Apocryphal  
and the second being Ezra, Nehemiah, Tobit, Judith and  
Esther.

The Books of Poetry and Wisdom: Job, Psalms, Prov., Eccl., Song of Solomon,  
Wisdom of Solomon, Wisdom of Sirach (or Ecclesiasticus)

The Books of Prophecy: Minor Prophets - Hosea, Amos, Obad., Micah, Joel,  
Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zeph., Hagg.,  
Zech., and Malachi

Major Prophets: Is., Jer., Baruch, Lam., Epistle of  
Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel (incl.  
Susanna, Bel and the Dragon, and  
the Song of the Three Holy Children).

The supplemental books of history: I & II Maccabees

The Latin Vulgate: It follows the same order as the LXX except that  
I & II Esdras equal our Ezra and Nehemiah and the

Apocryphal parts ( III & IV Esdras are placed after the NT Books, as is also the Prayer of Manasseh. Also in the Vulgate, the major prophets are placed before the minor Prophets. From this it will be seen that our modern Bible follows the order of the Vulgate but the content of the Masoretic Text. Also, the Apocrypha and large, apocryphal parts of Esther are omitted.

(1) We should note that the above order of the MT was a later revision to help in the polemics with the Christian writers. The old MT order contained the same 39 books of the O.T. but they were grouped in only 24 books. Josephus, 37 - 100 A.D. contained the same 39 books, but had them listed in only 22 books.

Since we are mainly interested in the OT canon as it existed at the time of Jesus and the Apostles, we shall omit certain features which would be germane in a paper dealing with the canon exclusively, but are not germane to our purpose. The earliest extant reference to the 22 book canon of the OT comes in the prologue to the Apocryphal book of Eccl<sup>Es</sup>iasticus by the Jew, Jesus ben Sirach, ca. 190 B.C. The division of Law, Prophets and Kethubim (writings or Hagiographa) is followed. Next comes Josephus of Jerusalem (37-100 A.D.) In his "CONTRA APIONEM" 1:8 he says, "We have not tens of thousands of books, discordant and conflicting, but only 22 containing the record of all time, which have been justly believed to be divine."<sup>(2)</sup> After referring to the Pentateuch the 13 books of the Prophets, and the rest of the OT (our 39 books) Flavius Josephus makes the following, very important statement. "From Artaxerxes (465 - 424 B.C. ) until our time, everything has been recorded, but has not been deemed worthy of like credit with what preceded, because the exact succession of the prophets ceased. But what faith we have placed in our own writings is evident by our conduct for though so long a time has passed now, no one has dared to add anything to them or to take anything away from them, or alter anything in them."<sup>(3)</sup> *See next page*

(1) ARCHER, "A SURVEY OF O.T. INTRODUCTION" Moody Press, 1964 P.59-60

(2) IBID. p. 63

(3) We note with great interest, that, this man who was so close to the time of our Savior, makes the same 3 divisions, Law, Prophets, Writings. He also states that there were no further canonical writings after the time of Malachi, despite what the higher critics, so-called, maintain, and finally, no material was ever included in the 22 canonical books (our 39) from about 425 B.C. until 90 A.D.

Thus, it is evident, without dragging this point out and going into even further detail, that the O.T. Canon as we now have it, was the same as that in the days of Jesus and the Apostles. Yes, there were a few arguments about certain Antilegomena, but these were resolved in favor of the present Canon by 90 A.D. And so, those who would cast doubt on the verbal and plenary inspiration of any part of our present OT Canon, i.e. the 39 books of the O.T. cannot do so on the testimony of Jesus, nor of His Apostles, nor on the basis of ancient testimony. Yea rather do all these witnesses contradict the wild claims of so-called higher critics.

The church fathers give the following testimony of the canon, of the verbally inspired books of the O.T. Melito, Bishop of Sardis (170 A.D.) gives a catalogue of the O.T. books and gives our present list with the exception of Esther, for a reason unknown to us. No Apocrypha are included, with the possible exception of "Wisdom". Lamentation is probably included with Jeremiah and Nehemiah with Ezra. Origen (died 254 A.D.) lists the 22 books of Josephus and the MT Canon. One difference, however, is that he includes the Epistle of Jeremiah, not knowing, probably, that it was written in Greek and never in Hebrew. Tertullian, 160-250 A.D., states that the number of canonical books are 24. Hilary of Poitiers (305 - 366 A.D.) places the number at 22. Jerome, (340 - 420 A.D.) advocated only the 22 books of the Hebrew Canon and the relegating of the rest, i.e. the Apocrypha, to a secondary position. This should be enough, even in a cursory way, to demonstrate to us that the early church fathers also considered our present list of 39 books as canonical and thus the verbal, plenary-inspired Word of God, and not the religious ruminations of Moses, David, et al. Before closing this section, I might add that every one of the 39 books of the

OT Canon are quoted in the N.T. except Ruth, Ezra, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon. Of these, only Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon were ever considered to be Antilegomena, but as mentioned above, this matter too was settled in favor of their canonicity by the meetings of scholars at Jamnia, 90 A.D. Thus, those who would limit the Word of God to only certain portions of the canonical Scriptures as a book, the Bible, dare to do so without any support this writer has been able to find from the early church fathers, from those very men who were much closer to that age when Jesus and His Apostles spoke with such earnestness concerning the authority of "the Scriptures".

## IV

We now take a giant step of almost 1000 years to the time of Luther and the writers of our Lutheran Confessions. I wonder if there was ever a man on earth who took the Bible, the Scriptures, more seriously. Certainly, there is no other person who has left so many books behind about the Bible. Luther wrote everything from commentaries to inspirational works, to sermon series. Surely, if ever there were a man on earth whose attitude toward the Bible can be known, that man must be Martin Luther. Let us now examine some of his works and try to find out exactly how he felt about "the Scriptures". The selections chosen have been taken at random during a rather cursory reading of "Luther's Works." The American Edition is the one this writer has used throughout.

Is the Bible the Word of God? Luther answers with a definite, "Yes!" but goes on to say that not every word which God inspired applies to us. For example, " God commanded Abraham to put his son to death; but that does not make me Abraham and obligate me to put my son to death. God spoke also with David. IT IS ALL GOD'S WORD. But let God's word be what it may, I must pay attention and know to whom God's Word is addressed -----One must deal cleanly with the Scriptures.<sup>(4)</sup> (Emphasis is mine) Luther correctly recognizes even those parts of the Bible which are not necessarily the "Gospel" as being God's infallible and verbally inspired Word.

(4) LUTHERS WORKS, American Edition, Muhlenberg Press, 1960 V.35, p.170

In speaking of reading the Old Testament, Luther says the following, "I beg and really caution every pious Christian not to be offended by the simplicity of the language and the stories frequently encountered there, but fully realize that, however simple they may seem, these are the very words, works, judgments and deeds of the majesty, power, and wisdom of the most high God. For these are the Scriptures which make fools of all the wise and understanding and are open only to the small and simple, as Christ Says in Matt.II (25)." (5) Anyone who entertains any doubts about whether Luther supported verbal inspiration or not should have those doubts removed by this quote. Luther was a supporter, correctly so, of verbal, plenary inspiration of ALL OF"The Scriptures".

There has been some discussion lately about whether all of the O.T., or for that matter, the Bible, is indeed " God's Word" in the sense of being divinely inspired. Some have even attempted to enlist the support of Luther for such an un-Christian stance. The next quote will show us very definitely where Luther stood on this matter. " For Moses---also provides so many ways of outward worship--sacrifices, thanksgivings, fasts, mortifications and the like-- that no one needs to choose anything else. Besides, he gives instructions for planting and tilling, marrying and fighting, governing children, servants, households, buying and selling, borrowing and repaying, and for everything that is to be done outwardly and inwardly. He goes so far that some of the prescriptions are to be regarded as foolish and useless. Why, my friend, DOES GOD (emphasis mine) do that? (6) Those who would foist upon the Church the false idea that only the "Gospel", whatever that might be in their eyes, is the real Word of God, will have to do so in direct contravention of Dr.Martin Luther's view of" the Scriptures". Luther recognizes that even those parts of the Scriptures which seem to treat only of mundane things are nevertheless the verbally inspired Word of God.

Some aspersions have been cast upon certain portions of the Psalter. In a spirit that smacks of rather smug self-content in re the "proper" Christian attitude, slings and arrows have been cast on certain Psalms which contain what may be labelled as "imprecatory" material. We shall

(5) Ibid.p.236

(6) Ibid.p.239

first look at Luther's attitude toward the Psalter in general and then take a quote or two on the so-called imprecatory Psalms. On the Psalter, Luther says, "The Psalter ought to be a precious and beloved book if for no other reason than this: it promises Christ's death and resurrection so clearly and pictures His Kingdom and the condition and nature of all Christendom that it might well be called a little Bible. In it is comprehended most beautifully and briefly everything that is in the entire Bible. In fact, I have a notion that the Holy Spirit wanted to take the trouble himself to compile a short Bible and book of examples of all Christendom or all saints, so that anyone who could not read the whole Bible would here have anyway almost an entire summary of it, comprised in one little book."<sup>(7)</sup> We will get back to the Psalter in a moment, but first the following quotes concerning threats and imprecations in other parts of the Bible.

"For after they have prophesied of Christ's Kingdom, all the rest is nothing but examples of how God has so strictly and severely confirmed His 1st commandment. So to read or hear the prophets is surely nothing else than to read and hear how God threatens and comforts. God threatens the godless, who feel proud and secure. And if threatening does not help, He backs it up with penalties, pestilence, famine, war, until they are destroyed. Thus does God make good His threat in the 1st commandment (Ex.20:5)."<sup>(8)</sup>

"To be sure there is in the prophets more of threatening and rebuke than of comfort and promise. And it is good to observe the reason for this. The godless always outnumber the righteous. Therefore one must always inculcate the law more than the promise."<sup>(9)</sup>

"Without His Word, all is idolatry and outright lies, however devout and beautiful it may appear to be. Of this we have often written."<sup>(10)</sup>

Now to return to an imprecatory Psalm and how Luther views it. " Here the question may arise how pious and spiritual people can ask for vengeance when Christ says in Matt. 5:44, 'Pray for your persecutors, do good to those that hate you, love your enemies.' In other words, desiring vengeance and punishment conflicts with love toward the neigh-

(7) Ibid. P.254

(8) Ibid. P.266

(9) Ibid. P.268

(10) Ibid. P.270

bor, since we ought to desire and do only good (Rom. 12:17). I reply: There is a distinction between faith and love. Faith tolerates nothing, love tolerates everything; faith curses, love blesses; faith seeks vengeance and punishment, love seeks reprieve and forgiveness. Therefore where faith and the Word of God are at stake, it is not right to love or to be patient but only to be angry, zealous and reprovng. (11)

Speaking on Ps.109, Luther says the following, "Why does Christ Pronounce such terrible curses when in Matt.5:44 He prohibits cursing and He Himself did not curse on the cross, as St. Peter says (I Pet.2:23), but prayed for those who cursed and slandered Him (Luke 23:34)? I asked the same question earlier with regard to vengeance. In brief, the answer is: Love does not curse or take vengeance, but faith does. To understand this, you must distinguish between God and man, between persons and issues. Where God and issues are involved, there is neither patience nor blessing, but only zeal, wrath, vengeance and cursing. When the wicked persecute the Gospel, for example, this strikes at God and at His cause. We are not to bless them or wish them luck when they do this. Otherwise no one could preach or write against heresy, because that is impossible without cursing. Anyone who preaches against heresy wishes that it be destroyed and tries hard as possible to destroy it. (12) You will notice that there is none of the saccharine whining here on the part of Luther that there should be a gathering of thoughts or opinions, whether they be orthodox or heretical, nor does one find an iota of criticism against those who struggle for orthodoxy, whether that be in the doctrine of verbal inspiration or in some other doctrine of Scripture. Those who would criticize a Christian or a group of Christians of a lack of love because they contend for the faith, really do not know what love truly is. True love is this that we LOVE AND TREASURE THE WORD OF GOD, THE BIBLE, above every other word!

"Unbelief is the source of all sins; when Satan brought about this unbelief by driving out or corrupting the Word, the rest was easy for him. (13)

"The slyness and villainy of satan is imitated by all the heretics.---

(11) LUTHER, op. cit. Vol.14, p.244-45

(12) Ibid. p.257-258

(13) LUTHER, op. cit. Vol.1 p.147

They call upon God as a witness that with all their heart they are seeking the welfare of the church; they call down curses upon those who, they claim, are teaching the ungodliest doctrines.---They do not want to appear that they are teachers of the devil or that they are heretics; yet they busy themselves with this one task of trying to suppress the true doctrine and to obscure the knowledge of God. (14)

"Thus the Anabaptists, the Sacramentarians, and the papists are all idolaters- not because they worship stones and pieces of wood, but because they GIVE UP THE WORD and worship their own thoughts. (15)  
(Emphasis mine)

There is so much more that could be quoted from Luther, but the above is sufficient, I believe, to demonstrate that Luther held God's Word sacred. For Luther, the Bible, the Scriptures did not just contain God's Word. No, they were God's Word, infallibly given and verbally inspired. Sadly, we shall have to leave Luther here and touch on yet one more point before we get to the man who caused this paper to be written. We want to see what our Lutheran Confessions had to say about "the Scriptures."

## V

Somewhat has been said that the Lutheran Confessions do not take a stand on whether the Bible, as a book containing 66 canonical books, is the Word of God or not. We would like to point out that this matter was never a point of controversy between the Roman and Lutheran churches. For each side quoted Scripture to the other as being authoritative. "---godly men---judged that these slanders and the dissensions in religion which were constantly increasing more and more, could not be better met than if the controverted articles would be thoroughly and accurately set forth and explained from the Word of God, the false teachings would be rejected and condemned, and, on the other hand, the truth divinely delivered be clearly and lucidly presented;--- therefore the theologians communicated to one another certain writings concerning this subject, sufficiently comprehensive and derived from the Word of God." (16) There is no argument here over what constitutes the Word of God. It is the Bible, pure and simple.

(14) Ibid. p.148

(16) Preface to the Book of Concord, Triglotta, p.11

(15) Ibid. p.149



Some have cast aspersions on our Confessions, intimating that they were of and for another era and generation, imagining that in today's world, something a little less explicit is needed. One also hears the argument that our Confessions were never meant to be perpetual expositions of the truth. Alas for this false argument, the writers of the Confessions did not view their work thus. Concerning the Augsburg Confession, they wrote, "The doctrine comprised in it, which they knew to be supported by the firm testimonies of Scripture, and to be approved by the ancient and accepted symbols, they have also constantly judged to be the only and perpetual consensus of the truly believing Church." (17)

The Confessors never had it in their minds to compose documents which would demonstrate themselves and their posterity as either "superior" or "inferior" to any others. Their one driving motive was to present the truth of God's Word in a clear and concise manner. "Therefore, when we had received these criticisms, we found in them many godly and useful suggestions how the transmitted declaration of the pure Christian doctrine could be fortified and strengthened against corruptions and perversions by the testimonies of Holy Scripture, in order that in the course of time, under its guise, godless doctrines might not be concealed, but an altogether unvarnished declaration of the pure truth might be transmitted to posterity." (18) My emphasis. Please take careful note of this quote!!

Does it show an unkind or unloving spirit to expose and condemn those who would nullify that which is plainly taught in Scripture, as some mistakenly contend? Well, not according to our Confessions. I quote, "As to the condemnations, censures and rejections of godless doctrines-- not only should all guard against these condemned doctrines---rather it has been our intention and disposition in this manner openly to censure and condemn only the fanatical opinions and their obstinate and blasphemous teachers, (which, we judge, should in no way be tolerated in our dominions, churches and schools) because these errors conflict with the Word of God, and that, too, in such a way that they cannot be reconciled with it. We have undertaken this also for this reason, viz., that all godly persons might be warned diligently to avoid them." (19)

(17) PCBC, Triglotta, p.7

(19) IBID.P.19

(18) PCBC, Triglotta, p.13

Furthermore, those who would contend for false doctrines, such as this that the Bible only contains God's Word and is not in fact the very Word of God, the Confessions make the following judgement, "Besides, this matter is of importance also in this respect, viz., that troublesome and contentious men, who do not suffer themselves to be bound to any formula of the pure doctrine, may not have the liberty, according to their good pleasure, to excite controversies which furnish ground for offense, and to publish and contend for extravagant opinions. For the result of these things, at length, is that pure doctrine is obscured and lost, and nothing is transmitted to posterity except academical opinions and suspensions of judgment." (20)

We have always thought, and correctly so, that the theological trumpet should not give an uncertain sound. We believe and Scriptures teach that the Bible, the Word of God is perspicuous and thus we can put its truths into doctrinal representations. That is not the view of some today, however. Maybe they are even the majority. Those who teach, as we do, that doctrine is important and that it can and must reflect Scriptural truth in its purity, are laughingly, no, sardonically labelled as sectarian spirits and legalistic hairsplitters on the same level of the Pharisees of Jesus' day. But in the THOROUGH DECLARATION, COMPREHENSIVE SUMMARY, we find the following, "---we should have a unanimously accepted, definite, common form of doctrine, which all our evangelical churches together and in common confess, from and according to which, because it has been derived from God's Word, all other writing should be judged and adjusted as to how far they are to be approved and accepted." (21)

"Necessity, therefore, requires us to explain these controverted articles according to God's Word---so that everyone who has a Christian understanding can notice which opinion concerning the matters in controversy accords with God's Word." (22)

"The sole rule and standard according to which all dogmas together with all teachers should be estimated and judged are the prophetic and

(20) Ibid., p. 21 & 23

(21) Triglotta, p. 855

(22) Ibid. p. 849

apostolic Scriptures of the Old and of the New Testament alone." (23)

"In this way the distinction between the Holy Scriptures of the Old and of the New Testament and all other writings is preserved, and the Holy Scriptures alone remain the only judge, rule and standard according to which, as the only test-stone, all dogmas shall and must be discerned and judged as to whether they are good or evil, right or wrong." (24)

Jesus knew well what the Scriptures were. They were the canonical books of the Bible and when they spoke, no matter what the subject matter, they were authoritative and the matter was settled. The Apostles knew that the Scriptures were the divinely inspired canonical books of the Old and New Testament, as far as the NT books were available at the time of their writing. They were appealed to as the authority to settle questions. The early church fathers also had this knowledge, as did the Lutheran Confessors. The Bible, as divinely inspired canonical books, was God's Word, and was used to demonstrate the correctness of their theological, evangelical position vis a vis the error of Rome and Geneva. But now we must turn our thoughts to a very clever use of the Bible by a man and by a group of men who would ask us the question, "Yea, hath God said?"

## VI

In his book, "1984", George Orwell introduced a new word into the English language. It is a word which has been widely used in political circles. Sadly, it also has a place in the world of theology. That word is "doublespeak". Doublespeak means to say one thing and mean the very opposite. Thus, war means peace, love means hate, etc. I am now going to give you some sad examples of theological doublespeak. They are sad, because they come from the mind of a man who, in the traditional sense, presumably was once a Bible believing Lutheran. His name is Paul Bretscher. He says. " We cannot consent to anything that compromises the pure doctrine of the Gospel or undermines the clarity and authority of the Scriptures as our only rule and norm." (25) This is beautifully put and I wish I had the ability to say some things so nicely. However it is doublespeak.

(23) FORMULA OF ACCORD, Triglotta, p.777

(24) Ibid. P.779

(25) AFTER THE PURIFYING,

P.G.BRETSCHER, 1975

Lutheran Education Association,  
River Forest, III, P.49

"The Word of God is the message, formulated in human words, which God addresses to our hearts out of the cross of Christ. Its closest synonym would be the term "Gospel", whether in the narrow focus of absolution (the pronouncement of forgiveness), or in a wider sense that takes in all articles of Christian confession, or in the widest sense that includes also God's Word of Law and wrath. Scripture is properly called the "Word of God", then, for the sake of the Gospel of truth and life in Christ which is its glory. Because of this message the Scriptures are our pure and clear fountain and our only rule and norm of faith."<sup>(26)</sup> This is a definition which contains many elements with which we are familiar, and properly understood, can be called a good definition. But, the doublespeak is beginning to show.

"I have found no Biblical text, however, which defines the term, "the Word of God" to mean the holy, inspired, divinely authored Bible---which would say, for instance, (following the pattern of I. Pet. 1:25), 'That Word is the Holy Bible of which God is the Author. Scripture does not advertise itself this way. What the Bible advertises as "the Word of God" is Christ and the Gospel which proclaims Him." <sup>(27)</sup> Emphasis is the author's.

"NOWHERE do the Scriptures regard or use the term "the Word of God" as an equivalent name for the Bible." <sup>(28)</sup>

We shall have to stop here for a moment to comment. For under the guise of Scripture, Dr. Bretscher is asking us to reject certain portions of Scripture as God's Word. He has no Biblical foundation for his claim. What he does have is this: that certain portions of the Bible do not agree with his imagination of what Scripture ought to be, and thus, such portions of Scripture cannot be "the Word of God". But we have heard this voice before. We heard it in the Garden of Eden. But to continue---

"I am talking here about the root falsity--the abuse of "the Word of God" when that term is taken to mean the Bible as God's divinely authored Book. This meaning is a misadventure of human reason, the work of men's minds. It has no warrant in Scripture." <sup>(29)</sup>

(26) After the Purifying, P.G. Bretscher, 1975 (from now on I'll label it ATP) ( P.77)                      (27) The Sword of the Spirit, P.G. Bretscher, 1979, Ev. Luth. In. Mission, P.9  
 (28) Ibid. p.9                      (29) Ibid. P.18

" I have long since ceased to use this falsified doctrine of the Word. Now I realize that I must also expose and renounce it, as St. Paul says, 'Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.' (Eph. 5:11) " (30)

Well, how does Dr. Bretscher intend to expose these unfruitful works of darkness which make the claim that all the Bible is the Word of God, divinely and verbally inspired? One way is to make the stentorian claim that nowhere does the Bible claim that the Bible is the Word of God. This is obviously true, because the Bible as a word does not occur in its present meaning in the Bible. The Bible was termed the "Scriptures" the ἡ γραφή and the αἱ γραφαί, which we dealt with in the first part of this paper.

So help me, I am reminded of the little boy caught with his hand in the cookie jar who replies to his indignant mother, "This is not a cookie jar. It is a container for sweets." Bretscher has been caught with his hand in the cookie jar. He refutes this, by saying that the definition of 'cookie jar' is in error. No matter what you name it, though, he is stealing from God's Word when he denies that everything written in the Bible is God's inspired Word.

But this does not discourage him. For he now appeals to Luther.

" It is clear from the Catechism that in Luther's mind, the " Word of God" is not simply equivalent to the Bible." (31) I do not know how Bretscher was able, at this late date, to get into Luther's mind to tell us just what Dr. Luther was thinking, but apparently he has found a way. Yet, we cannot agree. The quotes in the former part of this paper make it unmistakably clear that Luther considered the Scripture, i.e. the canonical books of the Bible, to be the Word of God. We say this knowing full well that Luther had some difficulties with the Antilegomena. Yet the question was not whether the canon were God's Word or not. Luther proclaimed that they were. The question before Luther was whether the Antilegomena should be included in the canon. In any case, these are not

(30) Ibid. P. 18

(31) ATP. P. 14

the books with which Bretscher takes issue.

" The miracle of God's Spirit in Martin Luther and the Reformation was not the discovery of the Bible or of reverence for its inspiration, the church had had the Scriptures and had revered them all along." (32) In good conscience I cannot imagine how a man with a doctorate in the Lutheran ministerium could possibly say that the church, and by this he must mean the Roman church, revered the Scriptures all along. Just because Rome hid the Scriptures, just because Rome led people to place confidence in the traditions and false teachings of the church, just because of these things, error was introduced into the Christian church. The argument between Rome and Luther was not whether the Bible was God's Word or not. The argument was this: Rome did not teach the Bible. Luther maintained that it must be taught. That was why he translated the Scriptures into German and called it, " Die Bibel". Well, let's try the Confessions. Maybe Bretscher can make some points there.

" When the Confessions are read with the "Gospel" understanding<sup>OF</sup> the term "Word of God" and "Scripture", they communicate something different from what comes through to anyone who reads them with the "inspiration" understanding. The fact that the Confessions do not explicitly distinguish between the two meanings we are now detecting in the term "Word of God" ( it was not an issue for them) belongs to the long background of our current difficulties." (33) I can make an even bolder statement. If we read the Confessions and take the word "Scripture " to mean the Koran, we will most certainly come out with a different meaning than if we accept the word " Scripture " to mean the 66 canonical books of the Bible. Bretscher's appeal to the Confessions is in fact not an appeal, but a charge. They did not deal with what he has raised as a problem, i.e. " the Gospel" as opposed to the Bible as the Word of God.

And yet, Dr. Bretscher does not let this silence by the Lutheran Confessors on this topic discourage him. He wishes that they had spoken specifically on this subject, and lo, that wish becomes reality.

(32) Ibid. P.40

(33) Ibid. P.16

For he says, " If we subscribe to the Confessions today, we stand where the Confessors stood and add our joyful AMEN to theirs. We know and confess the Gospel in its truth and purity, and the Scriptures in their true glory as the " the Word of God".<sup>(34)</sup> Of course, Dr. Bretscher just claims that the Confessions agree with him, in much the same way as he has explained to us what Martin Luther was thinking when he wrote his catechism. He says it, and therefore it must be true, because he wishes it to be true.

However, if this fails to convince you, then the Dr. has another argument. He claims that when Lutheran conservatives use the term " Word of God", they do it in an ambiguous way, in a way which no one can really understand what they mean. In other words, the trumpet is giving an unclear sound. Yet please note the following. " From this 'inspiration' concept of the Word of God, certain inferences proceed quite logically. 'God is therefore the true Author of every word of scripture', that is, of the Book. It follows that Scripture: as a canonical book possesses qualities appropriate to its divine authorship: holiness, spirit, power, authority, inerrancy, clarity, uniqueness.-- To a minority, however, "the Word of God" means the Spirit's proclamation of grace in Christ to sinners, and the Scriptures as the fountain and norm of that Word.--- The confusion is endless.---Second, not only logical, but also theological questions are involved in the ambiguity of the term, " the Word of God'.---Our long ambiguity and unsuspected double meaning with regard to the term " Word of God" has resulted not only in logical confusions which have utterly thwarted meaningful discussion, and not only in theological division which is driving us toward schism, but also in <sup>a</sup>severe handicaps to Lutheran education." <sup>(35)</sup> From what Dr. Bretscher said in the first part of the quote, one can hardly believe what he says in the second part. The term "the Word of God" is not really ambiguous, for he perfectly understands that it means plenary inspiration with its subsequent authoritativeness. No, here is another example of theological doublespeak. There is ambiguity because Dr. Bretscher wishes there to be ambiguity and not because there really is an objective reason for it.

(34) Ibid. P. 41.

(35) Ibid. P. 15-17

In his book, AFTER THE PURIFYING, Dr. Bretscher makes much of the analogy of purifying fire. This purifying fire is supposed to cleanse out the dross of what he considers mistaken theological assumptions regarding the meaning of "the Word of God". I would take you back with me to Mt. Sinai when Aaron in a most disingenuous way answered Moses' query regarding the idol, namely that he had merely thrown some gold into the fire <sup>and</sup> "there came out this calf". Ex.32:24. Dr. Bretscher has taken the Word <sup>^</sup> of God, more precious than fine gold, cast it into the fire of higher criticism, so-called, and has come out with the following. "It is vital for Lutheran education to distinguish between the historical reality of Scripture (horizontal line) and the theological (vertical line). ---Scripture is abused when its words are made to predict coming events through exotic but superficial applications of its apocalyptic imagery (as in Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah, and Revelation). Scripture is equally abused when the Bible is summoned to be the authoritative source of historical, geographical, and other 'scientific' information." (36)

"Certain areas in which contemporary Biblical studies have seemed to pose so great a threat are well known in our Synod. They have to do with the authorship of Biblical books, with the formation of the Pentateuch in the Old Testament and of the Gospels in the New, with the use the New Testament makes of Old Testament texts, with the understanding of literary forms, with the historicity and facticity of persons and events, with the authenticity of Jesus' own utterances in relation to the voices of witnesses who breathed His Spirit and spoke in His name, with the interchangeable identification between Jesus and His church.

"Through the purifying, Lutheran education will understand that all such questions have to do with the 'historical reality' of Scripture. ---It is not appropriate, therefore, to approach such questions by appealing to the Bible's inspiration and authority. We must rather summon the soundest reasoning of which we are capable, based on a careful gathering and examination of the literary evidence." (37)

Bretscher has tossed "the Word of God" into his "purifying fire" and

(36) Ibid. P.86

(37) Ibid. P.87



out has popped the golden calf of higher criticism. The verbiage may be a little different, but we are back at the old task of trying to determine what is "Historie" and what is "Geschichte" in the Bible.

I cannot have much sympathy for men who, even though so learned in the Bible, have again fallen for satan's lie, "Yea, hath God said?" As I look at these men from the school of higher criticism, and as I consider the precious sheep and lambs of our Savior who come under their influence, I am reminded of Cicero's words " O praeclarum custodem ovium, lupum!" I close this paper with the words of Luther in the large Catechism, " Now what is the devil? Nothing else than what the Scriptures call him, a liar and a murderer. A liar, to lead the heart astray from the Word of God and to blind it that you cannot feel your distress or come to Christ." (38) Soli Deo Gloria.

Richard M. Seeger  
St. John's Antigua, West Indies  
July, 1983

(38) Trigl. P. 771 & 773