

How the faith was delivered

Reading Jude 3 '... the faith which was once delivered unto the saints'

This verse could equally be translated 'once *for all* delivered' the sense being it *has been* delivered, given, surrendered or transmitted to the people of God all in one piece. At the time it was written (a little before AD 70) the vast majority of the New testament had already been written. What remained were the epistles of John (the Gospel of John had probably already been written) and Revelation. God's written revelation, The Faith, was 90% complete.

Jude's words, supporting other scriptures show it would be a unit, 'once for all.' Once the period of revelation was over the Bible would be complete. Nothing could be added; it would be fixed and certain. Sometimes people ask why it was concluded in such a short period of time (concluding just before AD 100 when the apostle John completed the book of revelation.) The reason is it had to be something reliable. It could not have uncertainty or be a Bible incomplete for generations or for ever. That would lead to spurious additions being made. This happens with some of the cults. Every so often someone comes forward and claims, 'This is inspired' despite being centuries after time. It is reasonable to see that God would complete the Scriptures a short time after the coming of Christ and His great work. He was the fulfilment of all that had gone before.

But Jude was not himself an apostle. He says of himself he is the brother of James (not James the apostle but James the half brother of Jesus). Jude was a half brother of Jesus and grew up in the household of Christ. Actually he was rather slow to believe in Christ. So you see, even in this tiny letter, the person who wrote it is not a nobody; while not an apostle he is part of the inner circle. An inner circle preacher and teacher, related to the Lord himself. He was on the spot from the very beginning, known to the other apostles and working with them. Anyone who wrote part of the New Testament was always totally credible. When Jude wrote The Faith was going to be completed but it was as good as complete then.

Revelation is essential to us. We have this Bible, Old and New testament. We regard it as the inspired Word of God from beginning to end. It is the revealed truth of God. It is necessary that God would speak into the world facts about Himself and us, and the way in which we need to be saved and how that would be accomplished. We cannot know these truths unless God reveals them. If he did not do so, human imagination would take over. All over the world, in every age, people would put forward their own ideas, it would be chaos. We are not qualified or capable of knowing about God. We are sinful people with limited minds and understanding. How can we look into, or grasp the plan of God and the way of reconciliation etc. Only God can explain all these things. So we should expect revelation.

Here we have it. A unique book, written as if it is written from God. It is absolutely consistent from beginning to end, with the same teachings and no contradictions. It is amazing that a book has been written over 1600 years, maybe more, and that it has no contradictions, no variation in the teaching and the same great principles throughout.: the holiness of God

the fallen human nature of man

the alienation of man from God

man's need of a Saviour

God's holiness and need to punish sin

the way God planned a way of salvation

Coming Himself in the person of His Son to make an atonement and take the punishment of His people

Salvation needing to be free

All these things are consistent throughout the Bible. It is a divine message and profound. A message

so powerful that if it is believed it brings us to Almighty God.

However, the criticisms are numerous. The same tiresome ideas are brought out to discredit the Bible. Why do people do so? The truth is that man does not want God and tries to get rid of Him. It has been said that man searches for God like a thief searches for a policeman! The truth is that the way of salvation taught by the Bible is humiliating for proud men and women.

There are various ways in which they try to discredit the Bible. The three main ways in which they try to do this are as follows.

- 1.They say it is full of contradictions and inaccuracies so that you cannot claim it is God's revealed word. This is calculated to demolish the Bible
- 2.They say it is full of copying errors and no one knows what the original books of the Bible said because no one has the original manuscripts. It is therefore a mass of error and scribel mistakes
- 3.They say the Bible was manipulated by the early church. The first serious copies of the books are so far after the time that they were written and they imagine that many people interfered and decided what would be in and what would be out and edited and changed them.

So there are three problems- contradictions, errors (copying mistakes which are supposed to be vast) and lastly that people fought and chose what was to be in, so they say there is nothing divine about this. These arguments are commonplace in an atheistic age, but they are as old as the hills. So we shall briefly deal with each one in a non technical manner.

Contradictions and inaccuracies

How many discrepancies are there in the Bible? How many times does one passage flatly contradict another? How many mistakes, in terms of history, geography etc are there? Generally, most complaints can be easily corrected because they are mistaken. So often we find that people who find contradictions have not studied the case, have not read the Bible and have not looked at it seriously. In short they are mythical contradictions that evaporate as soon as you seriously examine them. As soon as the details are investigated it is found that there is no real contradiction and that what is written is perfectly reasonable. Very few passages in the Bible present any kind of problem. It used to be thought years ago that there were many mistakes of history and geography. We have a tremendous advantage today for we have benefited from lots of archaeological research and discovery. Every time some new artefact comes to light, it is the Bible which is confirmed, not the ideas of the critics. We can fill volumes with instances of this today. Secular ideas of history are those which have had to be adjusted, not the Bible. It simply isn't true that there are contractions and inaccuracies. Today if anyone wants to debate this, there are any number of preachers and teachers who will take them on in this, because in this area they are on very thin ice. The Bible is not contradictory, it is the very opposite. There are things in the Bible that the writers could not have possibly known naturally, had God not revealed it to them. The things written more than two millennia ago in the Old Testament have been shown over time to be accurate.

Copying errors

Is it true that over the years the Bible has picked up many mistakes? First a little about the Old Testament portion of the Bible. The first really complete Hebrew version of the Old Testament is from about AD700. This is nothing like as old as you would think. It is a long time after the Old Testament, put together by the great Masseratic scholars of AD70. The idea is therefore suggested, that it may have been corrupted by much copying over the centuries. The scholars who did the copying were very careful. You would think that they had access to the very earliest documents, but nobody knows. It seems very suspicious. However, many years ago the Dead Sea Scrolls came to light. Before any portions were translated people predicted that these Old testament books which dated from as early as 150BC or even possibly 200BC would be substantially different with many

alterations. There were many jokes and jibes and much scorn. As soon as the translators got to work, what was discovered? As book after book in the Qumran libraries were translated there was found a stunning likeness with the Hebrew Bible of AD700. People were astonished! How can this be? A 900 year difference but these documents were almost exactly the same. Even cynics began to say that this must be a case of divine preservation. Of course it is a myth that when there is a big gap in time there is bound to be a change. Even naturally speaking these were important religious books, meticulously copied by those who believed. The doubts over the Bible's accuracy were just glib assumptions. The Dead Sea scrolls confirmed that the scriptures were amazingly preserved.

While we do not have books going back to the original authors, it is telling that there are no changes in the leap of time from 200BC to AD700. Do not let people cause you to doubt with ideas such as this.

There is another translation of the Old Testament which was created about 200BC. This is a complete Old Testament Bible. A number of Hebrew scholars decided that the Hebrew scriptures needed to be translated into Greek for the benefit of all the Jews who had lost their Hebrew mother tongue and only spoke Aramaic or Greek. This translation is still available and is called the Septuagint. The English translation of the Greek Septuagint may be bought in bookshops today. The English translation of the Septuagint may be compared with the English Old Testament and it can be seen how identical they are. Don't believe the things that people who don't know say about the copying changes, it simply is not true.

What about the New Testament? This contains twenty seven books. The earliest complete manuscripts in Greek of the the New Testament are from the fourth century AD, three hundred years after it was written. People say that this is an opportunity for corruption. Is it true that there have been copying changes and errors?

What way have we got for verifying these books' accuracy? There is a very good way. Altogether there are five thousand ancient manuscripts of the New Testament. Most of them are portions, small bits, Very few of them are complete. Some of the fragments go back to the second century AD. The oldest known manuscript is from about 120AD. This is not many years after the Apostle John died, approximately a dozen years after his death. We do not know exactly when he died, except to say that he was very old. They are only fragments, but when you compare them with the first complete manuscripts of the New Testament, from 300AD onwards, they are exactly the same.

However, there is a surprising statistic- though there are 500 fragments of manuscript there are over 200,000 errors in them! Is this true? Yes this is true. There are 200,000 errors that you can find between these manuscripts, but don't be alarmed. 200,000 is not as many as it sounds when you consider certain things.

Let's suppose there are 5000 manuscripts and the very earliest of them spells a word in a particular way and the other 4999 join together in spelling the word in a slightly different way. That counts as 4999 errors even though you may consider that to be only one error. When you consider that is the way that the errors are quantified you can see they arrive at such a large number. The vast majority of these supposed discrepancies are spelling differences, sometimes only two characters different. Many of them are word order differences. For example, a slightly different word order in a sentence that results in the same meaning. Nearly all are like this and these differences are trivial. However, one can be shaken to hear that statistic without hearing the whole story.

Very few passages need to be debated or discussed. Sometimes the solution is obvious because the majority of manuscripts all say the same thing and only a few are out of line. As there are so many fragments it is normally obvious which one is right. The differences that are left are minor. It is the

case that there are no Christian doctrines that are challenged or affected by any of these little differences. There is a great confession of faith called the Baptist confession, based largely on the Westminster confession. It has thirty two chapters which give thirty two heads of Christian doctrine, four hundred and twenty two paragraphs, each one a doctrine and not one of those doctrines is challenged by the few errors left. This is how reliable the new testament is.

Was the Bible edited?

Did ministers play games with it? Did they discuss what should and should not be included in the Bible? The critics' idea is that there were many more letters, or epistles, and Christian books in Christian circles in the first three centuries than are included in the Bible. Why aren't these books in the Bible? Who decided what was in and what was out? Who were these people who played games with the Bible, who decided? However, these ideas are nonsense.

With the Old testament there is no problem. It was closed in 430BC with the last of the minor prophets Malachi. He was considered to be by the Jews to be the last inspired prophet, and with him the Old Testament was closed. This is very clear. The Lord Jesus Christ confirmed when on earth that the Old Testament canon was complete and would stand for all time. There is no real argument over this.

With the New Testament, who decided what would be in the Bible? The first complete New Testament is from AD300. Did someone decide prior to this what would be included? The person who decided what would be included was the Lord Jesus Christ. You may say that he lived before some of these were written. This is true but consider his words in John 14:26 *But the comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever, I have said unto you.*

John 15:26 *But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me.*

John 16:13 *Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatever he shall hear, that shall he speak; and he will show you things to come.*

The Lord in these verses addresses his disciples, the apostles, clearly saying 'you' who are the apostles will be the ones that will be inspired to know the truth. This is the rule. Who decides? The Lord said that the apostles would decide because they would be inspired to complete the scriptures. They would be his 'agents', his spokesmen. The only books included in the New Testament are by apostles or by close companions of apostles whom apostles dictated to or approved. The key here is the apostles. Some critics dismiss this argument, along with the fact that Christ is God. They don't think his words are very significant or those of the apostles. But if you undermine the authority of Christ this becomes just foolish speculation. The apostle Paul confirms this when he says in Ephesians 2:20 the church is 'built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone.' This is the foundation, if it is not from the apostles then it is not inspired. No book can be included which was written in later ages, for no book can be included which is not authenticated by an apostle. Therefore no book can be included after the times of the apostles. The Bible was complete before AD 100.

There are eight authors in the New Testament, only eight. Four apostles, and four 'inner circle' like James and Jude who were half brothers. Matthew, who was an apostle, wrote a Gospel. John, another apostle wrote a Gospel, three epistles and the book of Revelation. Peter, an apostle wrote two epistles. The apostle Paul wrote fourteen epistles if we include Hebrews, There were four more, Luke the doctor, a travelling companion of Paul and a member of the inner circle and Mark (the penman of Peter), James and Jude. That is all, this is the new Testament.

But what about the other letters that people talk about? Clement of Rome, the book of Thomas and

others, why aren't they in the New testament? The answer is because they were not apostles or authenticated by them. Clement approves of the apostle Paul and regards him as inspired but he does not regard his own writing as inspired. He knew he was not an apostle. Most of these books are far too late to be inspired or authenticated. Most are written by godly men and ministers who wrote to churches but they do not claim to be part of Scripture. Nor did anybody at the time say they were. In Jude verse 3 we read '*Beloved.. exhort that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.*' This 'one faith' is consistent throughout;

-a belief in God who is good and holy

-a belief that we are members of a human race, estranged from God

-a belief that we are lost sinners in need of a Saviour

-a belief that Christ is that Saviour and suffered and died in agony on Calvary's cross to bear away the punishment that we should have borne eternally

-a belief in the fact that if we repent and trust in him and not in any supposed goodness in ourselves then he will save us

a belief in the promised conversion and eternal life.

Do you believe in these things? If you do then you can be saved.

Jude 21 states, '*keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.*' The Bible is God's book, it is faultless, it is inspired Scripture, it is absolutely reliable. The criticisms made do not stand up. How much we need revelation, we depend on it, that God should speak into our world and tell us how to seek, find and how sin can be atoned for if we trust in Christ. How else can we find the truth? What a message this is. To believe in this is what saves the soul.