

Distinctive Preaching

I cannot conceive of their having ever been a time in all of the history of the church that distinctive preaching was not needed. Perhaps there have been periods of that history in which such preaching was more sorely needed than at other times; but if so, the failure of some to preach a distinctive gospel was responsible for the increase of the need for it. And it may be that there was never a time when the need for distinctive preaching was more imperative than now. We have entirely too much preaching that means nothing, and the need of the hour is for men who have the courage to preach a distinctive message.

- by *W. Curtis Porter*

Can We Believe The Bible?

Question: What proof do we have that we can trust the Bible for everything it says. The Bible has been handed down so many times. The translation has been changed and everybody knows when you're passing on information the meaning never comes back the way it originated. One word changed can change the whole meaning of the passage. The Bible was written so long ago how do we know its meaning is still the same and how do we know it's not just another man-made project.

Answer: The proof that you ask about is found in many places.

First, there is archaeology. Archaeologists have uncovered evidence in many places and from across many centuries about many different aspects of the Bible. For example, at one time skeptics doubted whether the Hittites, which are mentioned only briefly and with little detail in the Genesis account, actually ever existed at all. Eventually archaeological discovery in Asia Minor uncovered an entire civilization, with their distinctive culture, language and history. The simple biblical references were found to be representative of a people who settled and traded throughout the entire ancient Near East in the time of Abraham and the other patriarchs.

Many biblical cities have been uncovered and excavated to reveal distinctive events such as destruction layers which coincide with the biblical story of the Exodus from Egypt and capture of many of the cities of ancient Canaan in the books of Joshua and Judges. Many other such things are well attested in both the literature of other peoples and from excavation activities. For example, during the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BC, the book of Jeremiah (with 2 Chronicles and 2 Kings) represents the fall of the surrounding cities while Jerusalem lay under siege. In the excavation of the city of Lachish, the so-called "Lachish letters" were found, which detail the gradual capture of the towns precisely as Jeremiah and the books of history describe. Furthermore, it mentions some who were "weakening the hands of the people" in the midst of the siege, which is precisely the charge leveled against the prophet Jeremiah in the book by his name. There are many other things, far too numerous to mention here, which establish the general tenor of the biblical writings as recording genuine history.

Further, as to the fact that the Bible has been handed down to us in the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament through many hands and many centuries, let it be noted that the Bible is the best attested ancient book in the entire world. There are literally thousands of copies of both the OT and the NT in their original languages which have come down to us - some of them extremely ancient. For example, many copies of the Dead Sea Scrolls (Hebrew manuscripts of OT books) go back to the first century before the time of Jesus, others perhaps even a century earlier than that. If we may trust that we have the works of Plato, Aristotle, Seneca, and the host of other ancient writers whose materials are not nearly so well attested, why would we not also be able to believe that we have the precise words of Christ and his apostles, as well as those of Moses and the Old Testament prophets?

As to whether the words were changed in the process of time and transmission to our day, you must remember that the transmitters (scribes) of ancient times were extraordinarily careful, believing that a curse from heaven was upon the one who would change even a single word of Holy Scripture (see Deut. 4:2; 12:32; Matt. 5:18; Rev. 22:18, 19). But since mistakes did occasionally occur because of oversights and writing errors, it was the hundreds of other copies

of the scripture that acted as a countermeasure to assure the mistakes could be corrected. This process of establishing the original text has come to be called "the science of textual criticism."

The translation process itself is really the most convincing part. Think of all the translations there are out there - literally hundreds of different ones in the English language alone. Take a few translations and compare them side by side. You know what happens? You come up with very little difference between them. Most only differ in the different ways of saying the exact same things!

The ultimate answer is YES, we can definitely trust the Bible.

- by Dan King

When Is A 'Miracle' Really A Miracle?

A fund raising letter from a local hospital said: "Miracles at this place are part of everyday life. Miracles that come from technology. And miracles that come from human caring. I've seen them happen." This is an excellent example of the inaccurate use of the word "miracle" in modern usage.

What this man is describing IS a wonderful thing. It's great to see a sick person recover. It is thrilling to view the fruits of recent technological advances in medical care. We are seeing things that folks only a few years ago never imagined. Open-heart procedures, organ transplants, laser surgery and a host of other new medical methodologies have been perfected in rapid succession. It is truly amazing - but, it is NOT a miracle! And, today we understand more than ever before about the "psychology" that is associated with physical illness. And this is surely helpful in bringing about cures but, it is NOT a miracle!

You see, by definition - and in accordance with accurate Biblical usage - a miracle is "an effect in the physical world which surpasses all known human or natural power ... supernatural." So, when a doctor uses a sophisticated new medical device to affect the cure of a seriously ill patient, there is no miracle involved. While the technology may be new and very advanced, it is still a procedure that is known and understood by men. It is an action that is in accord with natural law. It is not supernatural. It is NOT a miracle.

Miracles are things like: walking on water, turning water into wine, raising a man who had been dead for four days; etc. These things defy a natural explanation. They are truly supernatural. The Bible records many instances of true miracles - but it also tells us that no such miracles are taking place in the world today (1 Cor. 13:8-13). No, there are no miracles at that hospital - or any place else!

- by Greg Gwin