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THE BIBLE: REVELATION AND AUTHORITY

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THE BIBLE: REVELATION AND AUTHORITY**Richard M. Davidson****Andrews University****Introduction**

I have not always held the view of Scriptural revelation and authority that I now maintain. Having journeyed through a different perspective on the revelation/authority of Scripture and then returning to the position that I now hold, I am convinced that this issue is basic to all other issues in the church. The destiny of our church depends on how its members regard the revelation and authority of the Bible. In the following pages I have summarized the biblical self-testimony on its revelation and authority. The major focus of the paper is biblical authority, but a short statement concerning revelation-inspiration-illumination introduces the subject, and other biblical testimony on the nature of revelation is subsumed under the discussion of biblical authority. The paper also includes a brief historical treatment of the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment understandings of biblical revelation/authority and an analysis and critique of their basic presuppositions in light of Scripture. Following the conclusion, a selected bibliography of sources cited and other useful books and articles on the subject is provided. Appendices include: (1) a chart schematizing the two major modern approaches to the Bible's revelation and authority (Appendix I, A-D); (2) some of Ellen White's insights on biblical revelation/authority (Appendix I, E); (3) the Methods of Bible Study Committee statement on the historical-critical method (Appendix I, F); and (4) a compilation of Ellen White references to "higher criticism" (Appendix II).

A. Revelation-Inspiration-Illumination: Definitions/Distinctions

The doctrine of revelation-inspiration is foundational to the whole enterprise of biblical interpretation. According to the biblical record God has *revealed* Himself and His will in specific statements of truth to His prophets (Heb 1:1). This revelation also includes the truth about who we are and the nature of the world around us. Through the *inspiration* of the Spirit He has enabled His prophets to communicate the divine revelation as the trustworthy and authoritative Word of God (2 Tim 3:15-16; 2 Pet 1:19-21). The same Spirit who has inspired the prophets has been promised to *illuminate* the minds of those who seek to understand the meaning of the divine revelation (John 14:26; 1 Cor 2:10-14).

B. The Bible and the Bible Only as Final Authority (*Sola Scriptura*)

A fundamental principle set forth by Scripture concerning itself is that the Bible alone is the final norm of truth. The classical text which expresses this basic premise is Isa 8:20 (NIV): “To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn.” The two Hebrew words *tōrāh* (“Law”) and *teʿudah* (“testimony”) point to the two loci of authority in Isaiah’s day which now constitute holy Scripture: the Pentateuch (the Torah or Law of Moses) and the testimony of the prophets to the previously revealed will of God in the Torah. Jesus summarized the two divisions of Old Testament Scripture similarly when He referred to the “Law and the prophets” (Matt 5:17; 11:13; 22:40). The NT adds the authoritative revelation given by Jesus and His apostolic witnesses (see Eph 2:20; 3:5). The *sola Scriptura* principle has two main components:

1. The Primacy of Scripture

Isaiah warned apostate Israel against turning from the authority of the Law and the Prophets to seek counsel from spiritist mediums (Isa 8:19). In the New Testament era other sources of authority were threatening to usurp the final authority of the biblical revelation. One of these was tradition. But Jesus clearly indicates that Scripture is the superior authority over tradition (Matt 15:3, 6). Paul also emphatically rejects tradition, and another source of authority, that of human philosophy, as final norms of truth for the Christian (Col 2:8). Paul likewise rejects human “knowledge” (KJV “science”; Greek *gnōsis*) as the final authority (1 Tim 6:20).

Both OT and NT writers point out that since the Fall in Eden, nature has become depraved (Gen 3:17-18; Rom 8:20-21) and no longer perfectly reflects truth. Nature, rightly understood, is in harmony with God’s written revelation in Scripture (see Ps 19:1-6 [revelation of God in nature] and vv. 7-11 [revelation of the Lord in Scripture]); but as a limited and broken source of knowledge about God and reality, it must be held subservient to, and interpreted by, the final authority of Scripture (Rom 1:20-23; 2:14-16; 3:1-2).

Humankind’s mental and emotional faculties have also become depraved since the Fall; but even before the Fall, neither human reason nor experience could safely be trusted apart from or superior to God’s Word. This was the very point upon which Eve fell—trusting her own reason and emotions over the Word of God (Gen 3:1-6). The wisest man in history (who ultimately failed to heed his own warning) perceptively observed: “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death” (Prov 14:12).

2. The Sufficiency of Scripture

The principle of *sola Scriptura* implies the corollary of the sufficiency of Scripture. The Bible stands alone as the unerring guide to truth; it is sufficient to make one wise unto salvation (2 Tim 3:15). It is the standard by which all doctrine and experience must be tested (2 Tim 3:16-17; Ps 119:105; Prov 30:5, 6; Isa 8:20; John 17:17; 2 Thess 3:14; Heb 4:12). Scripture thus provides the framework, the divine perspective, the foundational principles, for every branch of knowledge and experience. All additional knowledge and experience, or revelation, must build upon and remain faithful to, the all-sufficient foundation of Scripture.

Thus is confirmed the battle cry of the Reformation—*sola Scriptura*, the Bible and the Bible only as the final norm for truth. All other sources of knowledge must be tested by this unerring standard. The appropriate human response must be one of total surrender to the ultimate authority of the word of God (Isa 66:2).

C. The Totality of Scripture (*Tota Scriptura*)

It is not enough to affirm the exclusivity and sufficiency of Scriptural authority as the final norm for truth. Those like Martin Luther, who called for *sola Scriptura*, but failed to fully accept the Scriptures in their totality, have ended up with a “canon within the canon.” For Luther this meant depreciating the book of James (as an “epistle of straw”) and despising other portions of Scripture (as presenting the way of Law and not the Gospel).

How much of Scripture is authoritative? The self-testimony of Scripture is clear in 2 Tim 3:16-17: “All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”

All Scripture—not just part—is inspired by God. This certainly includes the whole Old Testament, the canonical Scriptures of the apostolic church (see Luke 24:17, 32, 44-45; Rom 1:2; 3:2; 2 Pet 1:21; etc.). But for Paul it also includes the New Testament sacred writings as well. Paul’s use of the word “scripture” (*graphē*, “writing”) in his first epistle to Timothy (5:18) points in this direction. He introduces two quotations with the words “Scripture says,” one from Deut 25:4 in the Old Testament, and one from the words of Jesus recorded in Luke 10:7. The word “scripture” thus is used simultaneously and synonymously to refer to both the OT and the gospel accounts in the technical sense of “inspired, sacred, authoritative writings.”

Numerous passages in the Gospels assert their truthfulness and authority on the same level as the OT Scriptures (e.g., John 1:1-3 paralleling Gen 1:1; John 14:26; 16:13; 19:35; 21:24; Luke 1:2-4; Matthew 1 paralleling Genesis 5; Matt 23:34). Peter’s use of the term “scriptures” for Paul’s writings supports this conclusion (2 Pet 3:15, 16) [“So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, speaking of this as he does in all his letters. There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures.”] By comparing Paul’s letters to the “*other* Scriptures,” Peter implies that Paul’s correspondence is part of Scripture.

The New Testament is the apostolic witness to Jesus and to His fulfillment of the Old Testament types and prophecies. Jesus promised the twelve apostles to send the Holy Spirit to bring to their remembrance the things He had said (John 14:26). Paul states that “the mystery of Christ” was “revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit” (Eph 3:4-5). The apostles held a unique, unrepeatable position in history (Eph 2:20) as bearing witness of direct contact with the humanity of Christ (Luke 1:2; Gal 1:11-17; 2 Pet 1:16; 1 John 1:1-4). This certainly validates the

apostolic writings by the apostles like Peter, John, and Matthew. Paul also was called to be an apostle (see Rom 1:1, 1 Cor 1:1, and the greetings in the other Pauline epistles), and he indicates that his writings are given under the leadership of the Holy Spirit and have full apostolic authority (1 Cor 7:40; 12:13; 14:37; 2 Cor 3:5-6; 4:13; Gal 1:11-12; 1 Thess 5:27; 2 Thess 3:6-15). Thus the New Testament embodies the witness of the apostles, either directly, or indirectly through their close associates Mark, Luke, James, and Jude (see Luke 1:1-3; Acts 12:12, 25; 15:37; 16:11; Col 4:10, 14; 2 Tim 4:11; Phlm 24).

All Scripture, both Old Testament and New, is of divine origin. It is “inspired by God,” literally “God-breathed” (2 Tim 3:16). The picture here is that of the divine “wind” or Spirit coming upon the prophet, so that Scripture is a product of the divine creative breath. Thus it is fully authoritative: profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness.

1. Inseparable Union of the Divine and Human

A corollary of the *tota Scriptura* principle is that all Scripture is an indivisible, indistinguishable union of the divine and the human. A key biblical passage which clarifies the divine nature of Scripture in relation to the human dimensions of the biblical writers is 2 Pet 1:19-21 (NIV): “And we have the word of the prophets made more certain. And you will do well to pay attention to it as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will [*thelēna*] of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along [*pherō*] by the Holy Spirit.”

Several related points are developed in these verses. V. 19 underscores the trustworthiness of Scripture: it is “the prophetic word made more certain.” In v. 20 we learn why this so: because

the prophecy is not is not a matter of the prophet's own interpretation, i.e., the prophet does not intrude his own interpretation. The context here primarily points to the prophet giving the message, who does not intrude his own ideas into the message, although the implication may be heeded by the non-inspired interpreter of Scripture.

V. 21 elaborates on this point: prophecy does not come by the *thelēma*—the initiative, the impulse, the will—of the human agent; the prophets are not communicating on their own. Rather, the Bible writers were prophets who spoke as they were moved, carried along, even driven [*pherō*] by the Holy Spirit.

This Petrine passage makes clear that the Scriptures did not come directly from heaven, but rather God utilized human instrumentalities. A survey of the biblical writings confirms that the Holy Spirit did not abridge the freedom of the biblical writers, did not suppress their unique personalities, did not destroy their individuality. Their writings sometimes involved human research (Luke 1:1-3); they sometimes gave their own experiences (Moses in Deuteronomy, Luke in Acts, the Psalmists); they present differences in style (contrast Isaiah and Ezekiel, John and Paul); they offer different perspectives on the same truth or event (e.g., the four Gospels). And yet, through all of this thought-inspiration, the Holy Spirit is carrying along the biblical writers, guiding their minds in selecting what to speak and write, so that what they present is not merely their own interpretation, but the utterly reliable word of God, the prophetic word made more certain. The Holy Spirit imbued human instruments with divine truth in thoughts and so assisted them in writing that they faithfully committed to apt words the things divinely revealed to them (1 Cor 2:10-13).

This first corollary of the *tota Scriptura* principle, that the human and divine elements in Scripture are inextricably bound together, is reinforced by comparing the written and incarnate Word

of God. Since both Jesus and Scripture are called the “Word of God” (Heb 4:12; Rev 19:13), it is appropriate to compare their divine-human natures. Just as Jesus, the incarnate Word of God was fully God and fully man (John 1:1-3,14), so the written Word is an inseparable union of the human and the divine. Even the supposed “difficulties” in Scripture, should not lead us to conjecture as to what may be uninspired or unrevealed “human” portions of the Bible which we may then reject.

2. The Bible Equals, Not Just Contains the Word of God

A second corollary of the *tota Scripture* principle is that the Bible *equals*, and not just *contains*, the Word of God. The testimony of Scripture is overwhelming. In the OT there are about 1600 occurrences of four Hebrew words (in four different phrases with slight variations) which explicitly indicate that God has spoken: (1) “the utterance [*neʾum*] of Yahweh,” some 361 times; (2) “Thus says [*ʾamar*] the Lord,” some 423 times; (3) “And God spoke [*dibbēr*],” some 422 times, and (4) the “word [*dābār*] of the Lord,” some 394 times. Numerous times are recorded the equivalency between the prophet’s message and the divine message: the prophet speaks for God (Ex 7:1, 2; cf. Exod 4:15,16), God puts His words in the prophet’s mouth (Deut 18:18; Jer 1:9), the hand of the Lord is strong upon the prophet (Isa 8:11; Jer 15:17; Ezek 1:3; 3:22; 37:1), or the word of the Lord comes to him (Hos 1:1; Joel 1:1; Mic 1:1; etc.). Jeremiah (chap. 25) rebukes his audience for not listening to the prophets (v. 4), which is equated with not listening to the Lord (v. 7), and further equated with “His words” (v. 8).

Summarizing the prophetic messages sent to Israel, 2 Kgs 21:10 records, “And the Lord said by his servants the prophets,” and 2 Chr 36:15-16 adds: “The Lord, the God of their fathers, sent persistently to them by his messengers . . . ; but they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words, and scoffing at his prophets . . .” The prophets’ message is God’s message. For this

reason the prophets often naturally switch from third person reference to God (“He”), to the first person direct divine address (“I”), without any “thus saith the Lord” (see Isa 3:4; 5:3 ff.; 10:5 ff.; 27:3; Jer 5:7; 16:21; Hos 6:4 ff.; Amos 5:21 ff.; Joel 2:25; Zech 9:7). The OT prophets were sure that their message was the message of God!

Numerous times in the NT “it is written” is equivalent to “God says.” For example, in Heb 1:5-13, seven OT citations are said to be spoken by God, but the OT passages cited do not always specifically ascribe the statement directly to God (see Ps 104:4; Ps 45:6-7; Ps 102:25-27). Again Rom 9:17 and Gal 3:8 (citing Exod 9:16 and Gen 22:18 respectively) reveal a strict identification between Scripture and the Word of God: the NT passages introduce the citations with “Scripture says,” while the OT passages have God as the speaker. The OT Scriptures as a whole are viewed as the “oracles of God” (Rom 3:2).

Though the Bible was not verbally dictated by God so as to by-pass the individuality of the human writer, and thus the specific words are those chosen by the human writer, yet the human and divine elements are so inseparable, the human messenger so divinely guided in his selection of apt words to express the divine thoughts, that the words of the prophet are called the Word of God. The individual words of Scripture are regarded as trustworthy, accurately representing the divine message. Thus the authority of Scripture extends even to the details of Scripture.

This is illustrated by a number of NT references. Jesus says, quoting Deut 8:3, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word [Geek *hrēma*, ‘word,’ translating Hebrew *qol*, ‘everything’] that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matt 4:4). Paul says of his own inspired message: “And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit” (1 Cor 2:13). Again Paul writes: “And

we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers” (1 Thess 2:13).

What is stated explicitly in the NT is also indicated by the instances when Jesus and the apostles base an entire theological argument upon a crucial word or even grammatical form in the OT. So in John 10:33 Jesus appeals to Ps 82:6 and the specific word “gods” to substantiate his divinity. Accompanying His usage is the telling remark: “The Scripture cannot be broken [*luō*] . . .” It cannot be *luō*—loosed, broken, repealed, annulled, or abolished—even to the specific words. In Mt 22:41-46 He grounds His final, unanswerable argument to the Pharisees upon the reliability of the single word “Lord” in Ps 110:1. The apostle Paul (Gal 3:16) likewise bases his Messianic argument upon the singular number of the word “seed” in Gen 22:17-18. Paul is recognizing the larger Messianic context of this OT passage, as it moves from a collective plural seed to a singular Seed.

Jesus shows His ultimate respect for the full authority of the OT Torah when He affirms its totality: “For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished” (Matt 5:18).

3. The Harmony and Unity of Scripture

Since all Scripture is inspired by the same Spirit, and all of it is the Word of God, therefore—as a third corollary of the *tota Scriptura* principle—there is a fundamental unity and harmony among its various parts. The various parts of OT Scripture are considered by the NT writers as harmonious and of equal divine authority. NT writers may thus support their point by citing several OT sources as of equal and harmonious weight. For example, in Rom 3:10-18 we have Scriptural citations from Ecclesiastes (7:20), Psalms (14:2, 3; 5:10; 140:4; 10:7; 36:2), and Isaiah (59:7, 8). Scripture is

regarded as an inseparable, coherent whole. Major OT themes are assumed by the NT writers and further developed.

The two Testaments have a reciprocal relationship in which they mutually illuminate each other. Jesus described how the OT illuminates the NT (and Himself in particular) in John 5:39: “You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; *and it is they that bear witness to me.*” Elsewhere Jesus describes how He is the Illuminator, even the fulfillment, of the OT: “Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them” (Mt 5:17).

Neither Testament is superseded by the other, although the later revelation is tested by the former, as illustrated by the example of the Bereans, who “were more noble than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with all eagerness, *examining the scriptures daily to see if these things were so*” (Acts 17:11). Even Jesus insisted that the conviction of His disciples not be based primarily upon sensory phenomena alone, but that they believe in Him because of the testimony of OT scripture (Luke 24:25-27).

Particular notice should be given to 1 Cor 7:10, 12, 25, where it has been suggested that Paul is distinguishing between inspired revelation (“command of the Lord,” v. 25) that is fully authoritative, and his own personal opinion (“I say, not the Lord,” v. 12) which is less authoritative. But a careful look at the immediate context reveals that the phrase “command of the Lord” refers to an actual citation from the words of Jesus, and what Paul himself says without a direct quotation from Jesus is still fully trustworthy (see vv. 25b, 40).

D. “Spiritual Things Spiritually Discerned” (*Spiritalia spiritualiter examinatur*)

In modern hermeneutical approaches toward the Bible, both among conservative/evangelical and liberal critical scholars, it is often assumed that the original intent of the Bible writer can be ascertained by the rigorous application of hermeneutical principles and exegetical tools, quite apart from any supernatural spiritual assistance. Thus non-Christians can determine the meaning of Scripture as well as Christians, if they use the tools and apply the principles correctly. This assumption is maintained in the laudable interest of upholding a degree of objectivity in interpreting the biblical text.

However, Scriptural data leads to a different conclusion. We note in particular, 1 Cor 2:11, 14: “For what person knows a man’s thoughts except the spirit of the man which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. . . . The unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.” This passage emphasizes two crucial aspects related to understanding and receiving the revelation from God’s Word: the role of the Holy Spirit and the spiritual life of the one who studies the Word.

1. The Role of the Holy Spirit

“Spiritual things are spiritually discerned.” Since the Bible is ultimately not the product of the human writer’s mind but of the mind of God revealed through the Spirit (cf. 1 Cor 2:12-13), it is not possible to separate “what it meant” to the human writer—to be studied without the aid of the Holy Spirit, from “what it means”—to be applied by the help of the Spirit. Both the original meaning and its present application involve the thoughts of God, which according to Paul can only be

adequately comprehended if we have the aid of the Spirit of God (cf. John 6:45; 16:13; 1 Cor 2:13-14; 2 Cor 3:14-18).

Some have resisted letting the Spirit have a place in the process of receiving and understanding the Word of God, because it seems to them to allow the subjective element to overcome solid exegetical research. It is true that “spiritual exegesis” **alone**—that is, an attempt to rely totally on the Spirit without conscientiously applying principles of exegesis and hermeneutics arising from Scripture, can lead to subjectivism.

But the proper combination of dependence upon the Spirit with rigorous exegesis based upon sound hermeneutical procedures arising from within Scripture, far from leading to subjectivity, constitutes the only way of escaping subjectivity. All come to the Scripture with their own preunderstandings, presuppositions, biases. This cannot be remedied by approaching the text “scientifically” without a “faith bias.” In fact, since the Scriptures call for a response of faith, an attempted “neutral” stance is already at cross-currents with the intent of Scripture (cf. Matt 13:11-17; John 6:69; Acts 2:38).

Believing and Spirit-led interpreters of Scripture also come with their own biases and preunderstandings and are not impervious to error (e.g., Acts 11:15). But for Christians who believe the promises of Scripture, it is possible to ask God to transform their minds so that they increasingly adopt and incorporate the presuppositions of Scripture and not their own (see Rom 12:1). The Spirit of truth was promised to the disciples, and to us: “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth” (John 16:13). It must be noted that the “you” here is plural; the Spirit directs interpreters together in the fellowship of the church body (Ps 119:63; Acts 2:42; 4:32; Rom 12:4-8;

1 Corinthians 12; Eph 4:3-6), where they may be benefitted by exchange with and correction of other believers.

Interpreters must make a decision that their pre-understandings will derive from and be under control of the Bible itself, and constantly be open for modification and enlargement on the basis of Scripture. They must consciously reject any external keys or systems to impose on Scripture from without, whether it be naturalistic (closed system of cause and effect without any room for the supernatural), evolutionary (the developmental axiom), humanistic (man the final norm), or relativistic (rejection of absolutes). They must ask the Spirit who inspired the Word to illuminate, shape, and modify their pre-understandings according to the Word, and to guard their understandings to remain faithful to the Word.

2. The Spiritual Life of the Interpreter

“Spiritual things are spiritually discerned” implies not only the need of the Spirit to aid in understanding, but also the spirituality of the interpreter. The Spirit not only illuminates the mind, but also must have transformed the interpreter’s heart. The approach to Scripture must be that called for by Scripture, an attitude of consent or willingness to follow what Scripture says, if one is to understand Scripture’s meaning: “If anyone wants to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority” (John 7:17).

There must be diligent, earnest prayer for understanding, after the example of David: “Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes; and I will keep it to the end” (Ps 119:33; cf. vv. 34-40; Prov 2:3-7). There must be an acceptance by faith of what the prophets say (2 Chr 20:20; cf. John 5:46-47). God’s word must be approached with reverence (Isa 66:2).

According to the biblical testimony, God not only knows and reveals truth: He Himself *is* the Truth! All three members of the Trinity are described as Truth. The Father is called “the God of truth” (Isa 65:16); the Son says, “I am the . . . Truth” (John 14:6; cf. Rev 19:11), and the Holy Spirit is called “the Spirit of truth” (John 14:17; 16:13). Truth is ultimately not just a set of propositions or doctrines or creeds, but a Person! Since Truth is ultimately a Person, the knowledge of the truth in biblical understanding is ultimately a personal relationship with Him who is Truth. “And this is life eternal, that they might know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent” (John 17:3).

In sum, the Bible cannot be studied as any other book, coming merely “from below” with detached, sharpened tools of exegesis and honed principles of interpretation. At every stage of the interpretive process, the Book inspired by the Spirit can only be correctly understood “from above” by the illumination and transformation of the Spirit, leading to a personal relationship with the Author of the Word.

E. The Text and Translation of Scripture

The issue of revelation and the authority of Scripture implies that one has access to what is indeed the Holy Scriptures—both in the original languages and in modern translation. This requires attention to textual studies and to principles of translation.

1. Textual Studies

The Bible itself underscores the vital necessity of preserving the words of sacred Scripture. Moses wrote with regard to the Torah: “You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take anything from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command

you” (Deut 4:2). “Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it” (Deut 12:32). The book of Proverbs expands this principle to the whole Word of God: “Every word of God is pure; He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him. Do not add to His words, lest He reprove you, and you be found a liar” (Prov 30:5-6). At the close of the biblical canon, a similar warning is found: “For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book” (Rev 22:18-19).

Unfortunately, no autograph copies of either the OT or NT Scriptures remain. But the history of textual transmission reveals how carefully and painstakingly the biblical text has been preserved down through the centuries to the present day. With regard to the OT, during the decades of the 20th century prior to the end of World War II, critical scholars had a very low estimate of the accuracy of the received (Massoretic) Hebrew text, since its earliest manuscript dated back only to about 900 A.D. and critical editions of the Hebrew Bible proposed thousands of conjectured emendments to the text. But since 1947 and the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS), which contained manuscripts or fragments of every OT book except Esther, scholars have been amazed to discover how the Massorettes had handed down virtually without change the textual tradition from a thousand years earlier. As Bruce Waltke puts it: “The presence of a text type among the DSS (c. 200 B.C. to A.D. 100) identical with the one preserved by the Massorettes, whose earliest extant MS dates to c. A.D.

900, gives testimony to the unbelievable achievement of some scribes in faithfully preserving the text.”¹

With regard to the NT, the amount of MS evidence for the Greek text is far more abundant than for any other document of the ancient world. There are over 5000 Greek manuscripts of part or all of the NT text, some 2000 ancient Greek lectionaries (NT readings arranged in order of liturgical usage), about 8000 Latin MSS, over 1000 MSS in other ancient versions such as Syriac and Coptic, and thousands of quotations—virtually the whole NT—in citations by the various early church fathers. The actual amount of substantive variation among these many manuscripts is very small. E. Abbot has put the situation in perspective: “About nineteen-twentieths of the variations have so little support that . . . no one would think of them as rival readings, and nineteen-twentieths of the remainder are of so little importance that their adoption or rejection would cause no appreciable difference in the sense of the passages in which they occur.”² F. F. Bruce concurs: “The variant reading about which any doubt remains among textual critics of the New Testament affect no material question of historic fact or of Christian faith and practice.”³

This is not to say, however, that there have been no scribal errors or even intentional changes throughout the history of the textual transmission. Although the last 150 years of diligent textual

¹Bruce K. Waltke, “The Textual Criticism of the Old Testament,” in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1979), 214.

²Cited in C. F. Sitterly and J. H. Greenlee, “Text and MSS of the NT,” *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (1988), 4:814-822.

³F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1960), 19-20.

study assures us that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written, there are small variations among the many ancient biblical manuscripts, and it is therefore appropriate to seek to recover the original text of the OT and NT among these many witnesses. The science (or art) of restoring the original text of the Old and New Testaments is textual study, often called “textual criticism” or sometimes “lower criticism” (in contradistinction to “higher criticism” or the historical-critical method). Textual study, as practiced by one who accepts the full authority of Scripture, rejects the presuppositions of the historical-critical method and insists that the final norm for determining the authentic text of Scripture is found within Scripture itself and is carried out within the context of the unity of Scripture.

2. Translations/Versions

The Scriptures give numerous examples of the need for a faithful translation of the words of Scripture into the target language: Neh 8:8; Matt 1:23; Mark 5:41; 15:22, 34; John 1:42; 9:7; Acts 9:36; 13:8; Heb 7:2; etc. The biblical examples reveal how the translation of Scripture should remain as faithful as possible to both the form and content of the original.

After the best (most original) biblical text has been ascertained, the challenge remains to represent accurately and clearly the form and content of the Hebrew/Aramaic/Greek (the source language) in the modern target language (the receptor language). In this process the translator must seek to bridge various barriers such as: gaps of time, culture, and geography; changed social-economic-political situations; and different thought patterns. He/she must decide whether the culture-specific expressions and descriptions are to be retained in the translation, or whether they should be reformulated into the equivalent idiomatic expressions.

There are three major kinds of Bible translations. The first kind, formal translation, places an emphasis upon word-for-word equivalency in the translation process. This kind of translation consists of two stages. It first analyzes the surface structure of the source language (the Hebrew/Aramaic or Greek text), with particular attention to grammatical/syntactical relationships, word meanings, and the meanings of word combinations. Then the translator transfers in his mind this surface structure of the source languages into the receptor language. This process of word-for-word equivalency gives a more exact and literal rendering of the original Hebrew/Aramaic and Greek. Strict “word-for-word literalness,” with special attention to precise nuances of Greek tenses and the like, makes an excellent study Bible. However, the drawback is that its readings are often rather wooden and stilted, and the aesthetic quality and cadences of the original may be lost. Some modern versions have succeeded better than others in capturing the lyrical and majestic literary beauty of the original while maintaining an essentially word-for-word equivalence.

The second category, called dynamic translation, emphasizes meaning-for-meaning equivalency instead of word-for-word. The translation process involves an additional intermediate step that is not undertaken in formal translations. After the translator analyzes the surface structure of the original language (Hebrew/Aramaic or Greek) and then transfers this structure in his mind to the modern language he/she then restructures the transferred material into idiomatic usage that represents the equivalent thought or meaning. The advantage of the dynamic translation is its idiomatic contemporaneity, its readability and clarity; but the drawback is that it involves an additional interpretative step in the translation that can be misleading or erroneous—depending upon the correctness or incorrectness of the translator’s interpretation.

Some versions seek to combine the best of both formal and dynamic translations, by providing a high degree of accuracy and faithfulness to the biblical text while producing an idiomatic, readable translation of superior literary qualities. This results in a very popular version, although at times problematic where the translation is more interpretative than literal. The idiomatic modern usage may also prove more difficult for purposes of memorization than the strictly formal word-for-word translations.

The third category of modern versions is the paraphrase. This type of translation is far more free with the original than the dynamic translations. It is a running paraphrase which is intended more for devotional use than serious doctrinal study. Although the language flows very freely in idiomatic modern usage, the reader should be very cautious about using paraphrases in serious study. Many liberties with the text are taken, and it is often more of an interpretation than a faithful and accurate rendering of the original text of Scripture.

An examination of the way the NT writers translate OT passages reveals that all three of the translation theories listed above are employed to a lesser or greater degree. Sometimes the NT citation is virtually word-for-word equivalence; sometimes the translation into the target language of Greek is more dynamic; and occasionally the NT writers paraphrase the OT passages. It seems to depend upon the occasion and the purpose of their translation, and these biblical precedents allows for all three types of translation for different purposes.

Reservations must be expressed about certain kinds of Bibles that are currently available. There is a danger, for example, with regard to a Bible translated by a single denomination, that the translation will be slanted or even skewed to support their unique doctrines. A similar weakness also exists in a one-man translator Bible, where the balance and input of many minds is not available.

Caution is also in order with regard to Bibles with systems of notes, or interpreting systems. Likewise, translations into simplified modern language for children run the risk of distorting crucial biblical themes. While all of these kinds of Bibles may have their place, the serious Bible student reader must carefully safeguard against allowing human interpretations to shunt the full force of the Bible text. The use of more interpretive versions should be diligently compared with formal word-for-word translations, if not with the original Hebrew/Aramaic and Greek.

F. Scripture as Transcultural and Transtemporal

The biblical writers insist that the theological message of Scripture is not culture-bound, applicable only for a certain people and a certain time, but permanent and universally applicable. Peter, citing Isa 40:6-8, forcefully states this truth: “having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God *which lives and abides forever*, because ‘All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but the word of the Lord endures forever.’ Now *this is the word* which by the gospel was preached to you” (1 Peter 1:23-25).

Most of the ethical instruction in the NT gospels and epistles may be seen as the practical application of OT passages: e.g., Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount applying the principles of the Decalogue; James’ application of the principles of Leviticus 19; Peter’s ethical instruction building on “Be holy for I am holy”; (1 Pet 1:16; citing Lev 11:44, 45; 19:2; 20:7).

Old Testament writers do not accept—and often explicitly counteract—the mythological, polytheistic theology held by their Near Eastern neighbors, and likewise the theological thought-patterns of NT writers, though expressed in Greek, stay within the trajectory of biblical Hebrew

thought, and do not imbibe alien thought-forms of the prevailing surrounding culture such as gnosticism and platonic dualism.

It is true that certain parts of the OT, in particular the ceremonial/sanctuary ritual laws and the enforcement of Israel's civil/theocratic laws, are no longer binding upon Christians. However, the NT writers do not arbitrarily decide what laws are still relevant, but they consistently recognize the criteria within the OT itself indicating which laws are universally binding and which have a built-in "statute of limitations."⁴

The OT *mišpatim* or civil laws, as applications of the Decalogue, are permanent in what they affirm, but the enforcement of these principles is tied to the theocratic government, and thus a built-in "statute of limitations" is involved. When the theocracy ended in 34 A.D. (in fulfillment of Dan 9:24, and announced in the covenant lawsuit of Steven in Acts 7), the end of the civil enforcement of these laws also arrived.

Likewise, the sacrificial/ceremonial laws were part of the typical system that reached its fulfillment in the Antitype Jesus, who carried out in reality on Calvary and is carrying out in the heavenly sanctuary what was typified in the OT rituals. The built-in "statute of limitations" of these laws was also indicated in the OT (Exod 25:9, 40 [cf. Heb 8:5]; Ps 40:6-8 [cf. Heb 10:1-10]; and Dan 9:27).⁵

⁴Richard M. Davidson, "Revelation/Inspiration in the Old Testament," Adventist Theological Society Occasional Papers, vol. 1, edited by Frank Holbrook and Leo Van Dolson (Berrien Springs, MI: ATS Publications, 1992) 119-125.

⁵See especially, H. Ross Cole, "The Sacred Times Prescribed in the Pentateuch: Old Testament Indicators of the Extent of their Applicability," Ph. D. Dissertation, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI, 1996.

In other cases where God condescended to bear with Israel's hardness of heart—such as allowing slavery and divorce—and did not immediately abolish these practices, Scripture clearly indicates the divine ideal in the beginning (Gen 1-3), and the Mosaic legislation, which was revolutionary for its times, leads back toward the Edenic ideal.⁶ The NT recognizes and applies this “from the beginning” hermeneutical criterion of permanence (see Matt 19:8).

In some instances of Scripture where it might be confusing whether or not a particular divine command is transtemporal and transcultural, the Bible gives clear indicators of the universal and permanent nature of the material. So, for example, the law of clean and unclean foods (Leviticus 11) must be seen in the context of numerous lexical, structural, and theological indicators (both in OT and NT) to make plain that this is part of a universally-binding legislation; the same is true for the laws enjoined upon the Gentiles in Acts 15.⁷

The general principle, then, articulated and illustrated by the NT writers in their application of Scripture, is to assume the transcultural and transtemporal relevancy of biblical instruction unless

⁶See Richard M. Davidson, “Divorce and Remarriage in the Old Testament,” unpublished paper presented to the SDA General Conference Divorce and Remarriage Study Commission, January 26, 1998.

⁷See Davidson, “Revelation/Inspiration in the OT,” 120-125; Gerhard F. Hasel, “Clean and Unclean Meats in Lev 11: Still Relevant?” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 2/2 (1991): 91-125; and Jiří Moskala, “The Laws of Clean and Unclean Animals of Leviticus 11: Their Nature, Theology and Rationale (An Intertextual Study),” Ph.D. dissertation, Andrews University, 1998.

Scripture itself gives criteria limiting this relevancy. As William Larkin states it, “all Scripture, including both form and meaning, is binding unless Scripture itself indicates otherwise.”⁸

Within this general principle, it is of course necessary to recognize that not all biblical *practice* is necessarily biblical *instruction*. The lives of God’s OT and NT saints, exemplary in many ways, were also faulty and sinful; the Bible portrays an accurate picture of their lives and characters, for our encouragement when we fall and also for our admonition *not* to follow their example in failure and sin.

G. The Enlightenment and Post-Enlightenment Rejection of Biblical Authority

1. Historical Development

There is not space to trace all the religious and intellectual movements that led up to and permeated the Enlightenment of the 18th century. In the 17th century Protestant interpretation fossilized into a rigid Protestant Orthodoxy with emphasis upon the precise formulations of right doctrine in creeds, and drove many to seek freedom from the stifling authoritarianism of the Church. Some followed the path of Pietism with its emphasis upon the individual spiritual life. But many others, in the wake of the Copernican Revolution and the struggle between science and religion, decided to throw off all external authority. Enter empiricism, deism, rationalism.

Within a few years, in the wake of the rise of rationalism (“reason the final criterion for truth”) a number of scholars began to view Scripture in the same way as any other book. The watershed of the Enlightenment came with Johann Semler (1721-1791) and his four volume German work *Treatise on the Free Investigation of the Canon* (1771-1775). Semler argued for the separation between the

⁸ William J. Larkin, Jr., *Culture and Biblical Hermeneutics: Interpreting and Applying the Authoritative Word in a Relativistic Age* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 316.

Bible and the Word of God: the Bible only contains, but does not equal God's word. The Bible was viewed from a purely historical perspective, to be studied like any other ancient document (like Homer). The divine inspiration was totally rejected.

In the decades that followed, German scholars developed an approach to Scripture totally "from below," without reference to its divine element. This approach steadily gained ground throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, and became known as higher criticism or the historical-critical method. The goal of this method was to verify the truthfulness and understand the meaning of the biblical data using the principles and procedures of secular historical science.

2. Presuppositions of Historical Criticism

The basic presuppositions of the historical-critical method—the principles of criticism, analogy, and correlation—are articulated in a classic essay by Ernst Troeltsch, and these are still recognized as constitutive for the method by modern historical critics.⁹ (See Appendix I for a schematic summary of the principles and methods of historical criticism.)

The one principle that is most characteristic of the method, without which it cannot remain the historical-*critical* method, is the principle of criticism. The word "criticism" here is used in its technical sense of Descartes' "methodological doubt," and refers to the autonomy of the investigator to interrogate and evaluate the Scriptural witness, to judge as to the truthfulness, adequacy, intelligibility, etc., of the specific declarations of the text.

In close relation to the principle of criticism is the principle of analogy, which assumes that present experience is the criterion for evaluating the probability that events mentioned in Scripture

⁹See Edgar Krentz, *The Historical-Critical Method* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), for substantiation.

actually occurred, inasmuch as all events are in principle similar. In other words, the interpreter is to judge what happened in biblical times by what is happening today; and if one does not see a given phenomenon happening today, in all probability it did not happen then. Since no special creation, no world-wide flood is occurring now, it most probably did not happen then. The same is true with miracles, resurrection from the dead, etc.; these must be explained away as non-historical.

The principle of correlation states that history is a closed system of cause and effect with no room for supernatural intervention. Events are so correlated and interrelated that a change in any given phenomenon necessitates a change also in its cause and effect. Historical explanations therefore rest on a chain of natural causes and effects. This is not to say that all historical critics deny the existence of God or the supernatural. Theoretically, and even experientially, many express belief in God, miracles, etc., but *methodologically*, historical criticism has no room for the supernatural. Scholars using it are required to bracket out the supernatural and look for natural causes and effects. Even those who claim to allow the supernatural to function as part of the method (e.g., Pannenberg and Stuhlmacher) ultimately base their acceptance or rejection of supernatural causes not upon the claims of Scripture but upon their own rational criteria of probability.¹⁰

Note how the biblical approach to Scriptural authority rejects each of these presuppositions based upon biblical evidence. With regard to the principle of criticism in particular, Gerhard Maier, a noted German scholar who broke with the historical-critical method, writes: “a *critical* method must

¹⁰For further discussion see Gerhard F. Hasel, Hasel, *Biblical Interpretation Today* (Washington: Biblical Research Institute, 1985); Eta Linnemann, *Historical Criticism of the Bible: Methodology or Ideology? Reflections of a Bultmannian Turned Evangelical*, trans. Robert W. Yarbrough (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990); and Richard M. Davidson, “The Authority of Scripture: A Personal Pilgrimage,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 1/1 (1990): 39-56.

fail, because it represents an inner impossibility. For the correlative or counterpoint to revelation is not critique, but obedience; it is not correction of the text—not even on the basis of a partially recognized and applied revelation—but it is a let-me-be-corrected.”¹¹ The biblical approach to Scriptural authority rejects the principle of criticism; it *analyzes*, but refuses to *critique* the Bible; it accepts the text of Scripture at face value as true, and refuses to engage in the three-fold process of dissection, conjecture, and hypothetical reconstruction (often contrary to the claims of the text) that is at the heart of all historical-critical analysis.

Some evangelical scholars have attempted to “rehabilitate” the historical-critical method by removing its anti-supernatural bias and other objectionable features and still retain the method. However, this not really possible, because presuppositions and method are inextricably interwoven. The basis of the historical critical method is humanistic historical science, which by its very nature *methodologically* excludes the supernatural and seeks natural causes for historical events, or at best accepts events as supernaturally caused only if they conform to their critical criteria of probability.

The central presupposition of the historical critical method is the principle of criticism, according to which nothing is accepted at face value but everything must be verified or corrected by reexamining the evidence. The Bible is always open to correction and therefore the human interpreter is the final determiner of truth, and his reason or experience the final test of the authenticity of a passage. As long as this basic principle is retained even to the slightest degree, the danger of the historical-critical method has not been averted, even though the supernatural element in theory may be accepted. And if this principle of criticism is removed, it ceases to be the historical-*critical*

¹¹Gerhard Maier, *The End of the Historical-Critical Method*, trans. Edwin W. Leverenz and Rudolph F. Norden (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1977), 23.

method. The presence or absence of the fundamental principle of criticism is really the litmus test of whether or not critical methodology is being employed.

3. Other Critical Approaches

There is a major recent paradigm shift in critical biblical studies toward various new literary-critical hermeneutical approaches. These critical procedures usually do not deny the results of historical-criticism, nor abandon the central principle of criticism, but rather bracket out the historical questions concerning of the historical development of the biblical text and concentrate upon its final canonical shape.

Many of these literary-critical hermeneutical approaches focus upon the final form of the biblical text as a literary work of art. These include such (overlapping) procedures as rhetorical criticism (James Muilenberg), New Literary criticism (Robert Alter), close reading (Meir Weiss), and narrative criticism. Common to all of these is the concern for the text as a finished work of art. The literary productions of the Bible are usually divorced from history and regarded as works of fiction or myth, with their own “autonomous imaginative universe” and “imitation of reality.” Emphasis is placed upon the various literary conventions utilized (consciously or unconsciously) by the writer as he crafts the biblical “story” into a literary work of art.

Another recent synchronic approach (i.e., an approach which deals with the final form of the text) is structuralism. Biblical structuralism builds upon modern linguistic theory fathered by the French theorist Claude Levi-Strauss, and has been developed in the USA by such scholars as Daniel Patte. Its main purpose is to “decode” the text to uncover the subconscious “deep-structures” universally inherent in language that deterministically impose themselves upon the writer. The divine absolute in this method is replaced by an absolute from below—the deep structures of language. A

related literary approach is semiotics, or “sign-theory,” fathered by Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles S. Peirce, which focuses upon the linguistic codes that form the framework within which the message of the text is given (much like the musical staff and clef in music where the specific notes may be placed). The concern of these approaches is upon neither the history nor the meaning of the text, but upon the layers of linguistic structures or sign-systems underlying the message.

In recent decades there have been developed a number of other approaches to Scripture that retain the critical presuppositions of the historical-critical method, but focus attention upon other goals than hypothetically reconstructing the historical development of the biblical text. Some of these new approaches build upon new trends of post-modern thought. Major examples include the following: philosophical hermeneutics (the metacritical hermeneutical theory of Gadamer and the hermeneutic of suspicion and retrieval of Ricoeur); hermeneutics of socio-critical theory, including sociological criticism (Gottwald), liberation (Gutierrez) and feminist hermeneutic (Trible); reader-response criticism (McKnight), and deconstructionism (Derrida).¹²

All of these latter approaches tend to have some external norm—be it philosophy, sociology, Marxist political theory, feminism, or the subjectivism of the reader—which replaces the *sola Scriptura* principle and relativizes Scripture. No longer is there a single objective, normative meaning of Scripture: rather there is a feminist reading, a black reading, an Asian reading, a Lutheran reading, an Adventist reading, etc. All are seen to have their own validity as the reader’s horizon merges with the horizon of the biblical text. The full authority of Scripture is thus rejected.

¹²See Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), for survey of the approaches described in the last few paragraphs on “other critical methods.”

Those who follow the biblical approach to Scripture apply the same study *tools* utilized in historical criticism and various other critical methods. There is careful attention given to historical, literary and linguistic, grammatical-syntactical, and theological details. But while utilizing the gains brought about by the historical-critical method, new literary criticism, and other methods in sharpening various study tools for *analysis* of the biblical text, there is a consistent intent in the Bible-based approach to eliminate the element of *criticism* that stands as judge upon the Word.

Conclusion

The biblical self-testimony is clear: *only* the Bible and *all* the Bible is Holy Scripture, the divinely-revealed standard of all truth. The Holy Scriptures do not just contain, but equal the Word of God. This written Word of God constitutes the final, absolute, sufficient and timeless authority by which all other sources of knowledge and experience must be then tested; it provides the framework, divine perspective, and foundational principles for every branch of knowledge and experience. The appropriate human response to the ultimate authority of God's Word is not one of criticism but of surrender and obedience. "For all those things My hand has made, and all those things exist,' says the Lord, 'But on this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, And who *trembles* at My word'"(Isa 66:2).

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Appendix I

A Comparison of the Two Major Modern Approaches to the Bible

Historical-Critical Method

A. Definition: The attempt to verify the truthfulness and understand the meaning of biblical data on the basis of the principles and procedures of humanistic historical science.

B. Objective: To arrive at the correct meaning of Scripture, which is the human author's intention as understood by his contemporaries.

C. Basic Presuppositions:

1. **Secular norm:** The principles and procedures of humanistic historical science constitute the external norm and proper method for evaluating the truthfulness and interpreting the meaning of biblical data.

2. **Principle of criticism (methodological doubt):** the autonomy of the human investigator to interrogate and evaluate on his own apart from the specific declarations of the biblical text.

3. **Principle of analogy:** present experience is the criterion of evaluating the probability of biblical events to have occurred, since all events are in principle similar.

4. **Principle of correlation (or causation):** a closed system of cause and effect with no room for the supernatural intervention of God in history.

5. **Disunity** of Scripture, since its production involved many human authors or redactors; Scripture therefore cannot be compared with Scripture ("proof-texts") to arrive at a unified biblical teaching.

6. **"Time-conditioned"** or **"culturally-conditioned"** nature of Scripture; the historical context is responsible for the production of Scripture, and thus much of Scripture is not authoritative or normative for today.

7. The Bible **contains** but does not equal the Word of God: the human and divine elements of Scripture must be distinguished and separated; the human elements are not

The Biblical Approach

A. Definition: The attempt to understand the meaning of biblical data by means of methodological considerations arising from Scripture alone.

B. Objective: To arrive at the correct meaning of Scripture, which is what God intended to communicate, whether or not it is fully known by the human writer or his contemporaries. (1 Pet 1:10-12)

C. Basic Presuppositions:

1. ***Sola Scriptura*:** The authority and unity of Scripture are such that Scripture is the final norm with regard to content and method of interpretation. (Isa 8:20)

2. The Bible is the ultimate authority and is not amenable to the principle of criticism: biblical data are accepted at face value and not subjected to an external norm to determine truthfulness, adequacy, validity, intelligibility, etc. (Isa 66:2)

3. **Suspension of the compelling principle of analogy** to allow for the unique activity of God as described in Scripture and in the process of the formation of Scripture. (2 Pet 1:19-21)

4. **Suspension of the principle of correlation (or natural cause and effect)** to allow for the divine intervention in history as described in Scripture. (Heb 1:1-2)

5. **Unity** of Scripture, since the many human writers are superintended by one divine Author; therefore Scripture can be compared with Scripture to arrive at biblical doctrine. (Luke 24:27; 1 Cor 2:13)

6. **Timeless** nature of Scripture: God speaks through the prophet to a specific culture, yet the message transcends cultural backgrounds as timeless truth. (John 10:35)

7. The Bible **equals** the Word of God: the divine and human elements in Scripture cannot be distinguished or separated. (2 Tim 3:16, 17)

D. Basic Hermeneutical Procedures:

1. **Literary (source) criticism:** The attempt to hypothetically reconstruct and understand the process of literary development leading to the present form of the text, based on the assumption that Scriptures are a product of the life setting of the community which produced them (often in opposition to specific scriptural statements regarding the origin and nature of the sources.)

2. **Form criticism:** The attempt to hypothetically reconstruct the preliterary (oral) development behind the various literary forms, based on the assumption that the biblical material has an oral prehistory like conventional folk-literature and arises from traditions which are formed according to the laws that govern the development of folk traditions.

3. **Redaction criticism:** The attempt to discover and describe the life setting, sociological and theological motivations which determined the basis upon which the redactor selected, modified, reconstructed, edited, altered, or added to traditional materials in order to make them say what was appropriate within his own life setting according to his own theological concerns; each redactor had a unique theology and life setting differing from (and often contradicting) his sources and other redactors.

4. **Tradition history:** The attempt to trace the precompositional history of traditions from stage to stage as passed down by word of mouth from generation to generation to the final written form; based upon the assumption that each generation interpretively reshaped the material.

5. **Canon criticism:** The attempt to reconstruct the life setting (sociological and theological forces) in the synagogue and the early church that determined the present shape and contents of the biblical canon; assumes that human forces explain the canonization process.

D. Basic Hermeneutical Procedures:

1. **Literary analysis:** Examination of the literary characteristics of the biblical materials in their canonical form, accepting as a unity those parts of Scripture that are presented as such, and accepting at face value the specific scriptural statements regarding the origins and nature of the biblical materials.

2. **Form analysis:** An attempt to describe and classify the various types of literature found in the canonical form of Scripture, accepting at face value the life setting for each form as indicated by the biblical data.

3. **Historical and theological analysis of biblical books:** A study of the historical background and life setting of each book, accepting at face value the Bible's own claims; an analysis of the particular theological emphasis of each Bible writer (according to his own mind-set and capacity to understand), seen within the larger context of the unity of the whole Scripture, that allows the Bible to be its own interpreter and the various theological emphases to be in harmony with each other.

4. **Diachronic (thematic) analysis:** The attempt to trace the development of various themes and motifs chronologically through the Bible in its canonical form; based on the scriptural position that God gives added (progressive) revelation to later generations, which, however, is in full harmony with all previous revelation.

5. **History of the canon:** Examination of the process of canonization of Scripture, assuming that the criteria for canonicity are inherent in the biblical materials as inspired by God, and that the Holy Spirit guided the Jewish and Christian communities to recognize these canonical books which preserved the witness of the Bible writers.

E. Ellen White Insights:

1. *Sola Scriptura* versus the principle of criticism: “In our day, as of old, the vital truths of God’s word are set aside for human theories and speculations. Many professed ministers of the gospel do not accept the whole Bible as the inspired word. One wise man rejects one portion; another questions another part. They set up their judgment as superior to the Word; and the Scripture which they do teach rests upon their own authority. Its divine authenticity is destroyed. Thus the seeds of infidelity are sown broadcast; for the people become confused and know not what to believe. . . . Christ rebuked these practices in His day. He taught that the word of God was to be understood by all. He pointed to the Scriptures as of unquestionable authority, and we should do the same. The Bible is to be presented as the word of the infinite God, as the end of all controversy and the foundation of all faith.” (COL 39, 40)

2. **Hands off the ark!** “There are some that may think they are fully capable with their finite judgment to take the Word of God, and to state what are the words of inspiration, and what are not the words of inspiration. I want to warn you off that ground, my brethren in the ministry. ‘Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.’ There is no finite man that lives, I care not who he is or whatever is his position, that God has authorized to pick and choose in His word. . . . I would have both arms taken off at my shoulders before I would ever make the statement or set my judgment upon the Word of God as to what is inspired and what is not inspired. . . .

Never attempt to search the Scriptures unless you are ready to listen, unless you are ready to be a learner, unless you are ready to listen to the Word of God as though His voice were speaking directly to you from the living oracles. Never let mortal man sit in judgment upon the Word of God or pass sentence as to how much of this is inspired and how much is not inspired, and that this is more inspired than some other portions. God warns him off that ground. God has not given him any such work to do. . . .

Do not let any living man come to you and begin to dissect God’s Word, telling what is revelation, what is inspiration and what is not, without a rebuke. . . . We call on you to take your Bible, but do not put a sacrilegious hand upon it, and say, ‘That is not inspired,’ simply because somebody else has said so. Not a jot or a tittle is ever to be taken from that Word. *Hands off, brethren! Do not touch the ark.* . . . when men begin to meddle with God’s Word, I want to tell them to take their hands off, for they do not know what they are doing.” (7BC 920 [MS 13, 1888])

3. **Cover your faces!** “Those who think to make the supposed difficulties of Scripture plain, in measuring by their finite rule that which is inspired and that which is not inspired, had better cover their faces, as Elijah when the still small voice spoke to him. . . . He, (God) has not, while presenting the perils clustering about the last days, qualified any finite man to unravel hidden mysteries, or inspired one man or any class of men to pronounce judgment as to that which is inspired or is not.

When men, in their finite judgement, find it necessary to go into an examination of Scriptures to define that which is inspired and that which is not *they have stepped before Jesus* to show Him a better way than He has led us. . . . I take the Bible just as it is, as the Inspired Word. I believe its utterances in an entire Bible.” (7 BC 944).

F. The Methods of Bible Study Committee Report (Voted in Annual Council, 1986, see *Adventist Review*, January 22, 1987) regarding the historical-critical method:

“In recent decades the most prominent method in biblical studies has been known as the historical-critical method. Scholars who use this method, as classically formulated, operate on the basis of presuppositions which, prior to studying the biblical text, reject the reliability of accounts of miracles and other supernatural events narrated in the Bible. Even a modified use of this method that retains the principle of criticism which subordinates the Bible to human reason is unacceptable to Adventists.”

Appendix II

Ellen White's References to "Higher Criticism"

1. "The warnings of the word of God regarding the perils surrounding the Christian church belong to us today. As in the days of the apostles men tried by tradition and philosophy to destroy faith in the Scriptures, so today, by the pleasing sentiments of higher criticism, evolution, spiritualism, theosophy, and pantheism, the enemy of righteousness is seeking to lead souls into forbidden paths. To many the Bible is as a lamp without oil, because they have turned their minds into channels of speculative belief that bring misunderstanding and confusion. The work of higher criticism, in dissecting, conjecturing, reconstructing, is destroying faith in the Bible as a divine revelation. It is robbing God's word of power to control, uplift, and inspire human lives." (*AA* 474).

2. "Man can be exalted only by laying hold of the merits of a crucified and risen Savior. The finest intellect, the most exalted position will not secure heaven. Satan had the highest education that could be obtained. This education he received under the greatest of all teachers. When men talk of higher criticism; when they pass their judgment upon the word of God, call their attention to the fact that they have forgotten who was the first and wisest critic. He has had thousands of years of practical experience. He it is who teaches the so-called higher critics of the world today. God will punish all those who, as higher critics, exalt themselves, and criticize God's Holy Word." (*The Bible Echo*, 1 February 1897, 34-35)

3. "What is the condition in the world today? Is not faith in the Bible as effectually destroyed by the 'higher criticism' and speculation of today as it was by tradition and rabbinism in the days of Christ? Have not greed and ambition and love of pleasure as strong a hold on men's hearts now as they had then? In the professedly Christian world, even in the professed churches of Christ, how few are governed by Christian principles. In business, social, domestic, even religious circles, how few make the teachings of Christ the rule of daily living. Is it not true that 'justice standeth afar off: . . . equity cannot enter. . . . And he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey'? Isaiah 59:14, 15" (*MH* 142)

4. "Men act as though they had been given special liberty to cancel the decisions of God. The higher critics put themselves in the place of God, and review the Word of God, revising or endorsing it. In this way, all nations are induced to drink the wine of the fornication of Babylon. These higher critics have fixed things to suit the popular heresies of these last days. If they cannot subvert and misapply the Word of God, if they cannot bend it to human practices, they break it. . . ." (*The Upward Look* 35)

5. "Night, dark and portentous, is enclosing the Christian world. Apostasy from God's commandments is evidence of this night, deep, dark, and apparently impenetrable. Systems that make the truth of God of none effect are cherished. Men are teaching for doctrine the commandments of men; and their assertions are taken as truth. The people have received man-made theories. So the gospel is perverted, and the Scripture misapplied. As in the days of Christ, the light of truth is pushed into the back-ground. Men's theories and suppositions are honoured before the word of the Lord God of hosts. The truth is countereacted by error. The word of God is wrested, divided, and distorted by higher criticism. Jesus is acknowledged, only to be betrayed by a kiss. Apostasy exists, and will enclose the world till the last. Its hideous character and darkening influence will be seen in the maddening draughts dealt out from Babylon." (*Bible Echo and Signs of the Times*, 1 February 1897)

6. "A day or two later, some one brought to Elder Starr a pamphlet containing the sermon of an influential Wesleyan minister delivered at a recent conference held in Dunedin, in which he defended the 'higher criticism' of the Bible, and made light of the opinion that it is a divine book, and that all portions of it are inspired. This led to more lessons on this subject, and a sermon on the 'Higher Criticism' that was well attended by the people of Napier. We were surprised to see the extent to which our own brethren had been affected by this infidelity. We see more and more clearly, that, in all our labours, the Bible must be exalted, and that our people must come to know the wisdom and the power that are in the Word of God. To the close of the meeting, and in all our labours since, this subject has been made prominent." (*Bible Echo and Signs of the Times*, 1 June 1893)

7. “But just as soon as some enter college and get a little bit of knowledge they think they know more than God. And you hear of the higher critics. Who is the Higher Critic? It is the Lord God of the universe, who has spread the canopy of the heavens above us, and has made the stars and called them forth in their order; that has created the lesser light, the glory of the moon, to come in its order and to shine in our world. And the higher critics come in. Who are they? Poor, finite man on probation to see if he will be loyal and true to God that he can stand under the blood-stained banner of Prince Emmanuel, and that he can become a child of God and an heir of heaven. Talk of the critics, the higher critics. We have God; we have his Word in its simplicity.” (*Sermons and Talks*, vol. 1, 255)

8. Testimony of contemporaries about Ellen White: “No Christian teacher in this generation, no religious reformer in any preceding age, has placed a higher value upon the Bible. In all her writings it is represented as the book of all books, the supreme and all-sufficient guide for the whole human family. Not a trace of ‘higher criticism,’ ‘new thought,’ nor skeptical, destructive philosophy can be found in any of her writings. Those who still believe that the Bible is the inspired, infallible word of the living God will value most highly the positive, uncompromising support given this view in the writings of Mrs. White.” (Address by A. G. Daniels at the Battle Creek funeral services; *Life Sketches of Ellen G. White*, 471)