

“And”

Joshua 1:1

On December 18, 1882, the *New York Times* reported that the day before, the Rev. R. Heber Newton had preached to a large congregation at All Souls’ Protestant Episcopal Church on West Forty-eighth Street. His sermon was entitled “A Reasonable View of the Bible.” He raised a good point: “if it were possible to read the book afresh, to take it up as if it was entirely new to us, how our blood would tingle as we read its pages!”

(Source: <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=F40714FE3E5910738DDDA10994DA415B8284F0D3>)

I agree, and I believe there’s a good reason for that. The Bible contains words of divine beauty and eternal meaning. This is a Book that lives as does no other. These are the very Words of Almighty God. As you might expect, the Southern Baptist Convention has an “official” stance on the Bible, as found in our document *The Baptist Faith and Message*.” The section on the Bible reads:

“The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is God's revelation of Himself to man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter. Therefore, all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. It reveals the principles by which God judges us, and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried. All Scripture is a testimony to Christ, who is Himself the focus of divine revelation.”

Jesus told us something of the importance of God’s Word, when He said, “*I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the law until everything is accomplished*” (Matthew 5:18).

When Jesus said, “the smallest letter,” or “jot” as in the KJV, He used the name for the smallest letter in the Greek alphabet, which is “iota.” When He said, “the least stroke of a pen,” or “tittle” as in the KJV, he was referring to the smallest part of a letter. In the Hebrew language, sometimes the meaning of a word is determined by the smallest of movements of the pen. Jesus is upholding the authority of the Old Testament Scriptures down to the least stroke of a pen.

Put this with other teachings in the Bible about itself:

“Your Word, O Lord, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens” (Psalm 119:89).

“The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever” (Isaiah 40:8).

“The entrance of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple” (Psalm 119:130).

And we learn that the Bible is inspired by God’s Holy Spirit: *“For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21).*

“All Scripture is God-breathed, and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16).

If all that is true, then we would do well to pay attention to all of what God has to say, even to the words which appear to be insignificant. Take for instance the little word “and.” In English the word “and” is what is known as a conjunction. Do you remember your English grammar? A conjunction is a simple part of speech that serves to connect two parts of a sentence. It could be the word “although,” such as “He attended worship services at his church, *although* he had out-of-town guests.” The word “but” is a conjunction: “This is the Deep South, *but* it sure has been cold lately.”

There are many others in our language, but one very important conjunction is the little word “and.” We probably use the word “and” as much as any other word in our language. “He finally made it home after a hard day at work, *and* sat down to relax for a few minutes before supper.”

Sometimes in the KJV the Hebrew word for “and” (“ve”) is translated “and,” “now,” or “then.” What a minute detail, and yet here is a spiritual truth that we would be too prone to miss. Many of the books of the Old Testament begin with this little conjunction “and” or “now” or “then.” Is it mere coincidence, or is it really inspired by God that it should happen this way?

When a book of the Bible begins with “and,” it indicates that it is so closely linked with the book just before it that it is really a continuation of the story. The little conjunction “and” is like a thread that ties the various books of the Bible together into a whole, so that they are not so many books, but rather many chapters in one Book, which we call the Bible, telling the same story throughout.

The book, or “chapter,” of Genesis has no “and” at its beginning because of the simple fact that it is the first book, or chapter of *the* Book. But Exodus opens with this connecting word. So does Leviticus, and so does Numbers. That says to us that those first books are inseparably united together, and form the first division of the Bible—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers.

But when we come to Deuteronomy, we don’t find the word “and” there at the beginning. The reason is because Deuteronomy marks a new beginning, a fresh start, for the Hebrew people. So it marks a new division of the Old Testament. But the book right after Deuteronomy is Joshua, and there is that little connecting word “and,” translated “now” in the KJV, right at the very beginning. Many of the modern versions leave it out entirely.

In fact, every book until we come to 1 Chronicles opens with the word “*ve,*” translated “and” or “now”:

Joshua 1:1—“*Now after the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, it came to pass, that the Lord spake unto Joshua...*”

Judges 1:1—“*Now after the death of Joshua it came to pass that the children of Israel asked the Lord, saying, ‘Who shall go up for us against the Canaanites first, to fight against them?’*”

Ruth 1:1—“*Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land.*”

..and so on and so on, through 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, and 2 Kings. These books are woven together with the little word “and.” They are telling one continuous story, not several little stories. Each one builds upon the book just before it. For example, Joshua continues what Deuteronomy began. Then Judges picks up with the same story where Joshua left off, followed by Ruth, and so on.

And the purpose of this is to show that this is one big story. It is very important, if we want to really understand the overall story of the Bible, that we see the big picture.

Henrietta Mears was a Minister of Education at the First Presbyterian Church of Hollywood, California, many years ago. In her book, *What the Bible is All About*, she wrote:

The Bible is one book, and you cannot take it in texts and expect to comprehend the magnificence of divine revelation. You must see it in its completeness. God has taken pains to give a progressive revelation and we should take pains to read it from beginning to end. Don't suppose reading little scraps can ever be compensation for doing deep and consecutive work on the Bible itself. We must get back to the Book and then we will not tolerate such work. One would scorn to read any other book, even the lightest novel, in this fashion.

She continued:

In one sense we should treat the Bible as we treat any other book. When we get a book from the library we would never treat it as we do the Bible. We would never think of reading just a paragraph, taking some ten minutes, reading a little at night and then reading a little in the morning, and so spending weeks, perhaps months, in reading the book through. No interest could be maintained in any story by such procedure.

Alan Redpath was the pastor of the great Moody Church in Chicago in another generation, and he wrote something on this subject. He was writing about the Bible itself when he said:

First and foremost, it is a book of Divine revelation. The whole Book is a complete revelation of God's plan of redemption for mankind. He places it in our hands as the key which unlocks the mystery of His love, of our sin, of His justice and mercy, and of His program of salvation.

Once we regard the Bible as a whole it begins to take on a new meaning. The Old Testament is preparatory to the New. The New cannot be understood apart from the Old, nor can the Old be appreciated apart from the New. Furthermore, we begin to discover that God's way of dealing with man in the Old Testament is but a picture of His dealing with man in the New. Salvation for a fallen race was to be through the Man Christ Jesus from the very beginning; but prior to His coming, His death and resurrection, God dealt with the nation into whom Christ was to be born in the same way as He would thereafter deal with men individually through the Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, God's dealing with Israel was a type of His dealings with you and me.

Once we grasp that truth the Old Testament is transformed from a book of dry history and unintelligible sacrifices into a book of Divine revelation.

--Alan Redpath, *Victorious Christian Living: Studies in the Book of Joshua*, Fleming H. Revell Company, 1955, pp. 11-12.

So this is no accident that these books are interwoven and connected like this. But what does the use of the Hebrew word “ve” (“and”) at the beginning of so many books in the early parts of the Old Testament—including Joshua—teach us about God?

1 He used many human beings as messengers, but the book has only one author.

Steve Kumar, in *Christianity for Skeptics: An Understandable Examination of Christian Belief* (Hendrickson Publishers, 2000), has written,

The Bible was written over a period of 1,500 years by more than forty different authors from different walks of life, and over forty generations: Moses, a political leader; Amos, a herdsman; Solomon, a king; Luke, a physician; Matthew, a tax collector; Peter, a fisherman. It was written on three continents: Asia, Africa, and Europe. It was written in three languages: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. It was written in different places: Moses in the wilderness; Daniel in a palace; Jeremiah in a dungeon; Paul in a Roman prison; Luke while traveling. It was written at different times: David wrote in times of war; Solomon in times of peace. It was written in different moods: some authors wrote from the heights of joy and others in the depths of sorrow.

Yet when we read the Bible carefully and see it in its entirety, we come to realize that there is only one Author. The most convincing evidence of only one Author is the continuity of the Scriptures which can be seen throughout its pages. The progression of the story from one book of the Bible to the next is evidence that here is one continuous story being told through several different messengers. We can rely on the authority of the Scriptures, because they *do* come from God!

2 He is the God of the ages.

Moses died. Joshua died. So did Saul and David. But the One Who was telling the story lived on, and lives today, just as actively involved in our lives in this day as He was in the lives of the Hebrew people centuries ago.

Just before he died, Moses gave a farewell speech to the people. Moses realized that the Hebrew people were about to experience a drastic change in leadership. He

had been the only leader most of them had known, and now he was about to die. In times like that, they needed to be reminded of God's eternal nature. So he said to them, "*The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms*" (Deuteronomy 32:40).

The psalmist recognized this basic truth about our Heavenly Father, that He is the God of all eternity:

In the beginning you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. Like clothing you will change them and they will be discarded. But you remain the same, and your years will never end. (Psalm 102:25-27)

And this truth is repeated several times in the psalms:

Your name, O Lord, endures forever, your renown, O Lord, through all generations. (Psalm 135:13)

Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures through all generations. The Lord is faithful to his promises and loving toward all he has made. (Psalm 145:13)

We see it again in the New Testament:

But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: with the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. (2 Peter 3:8)

I am the Alpha and the Omega, says the Lord God, who is and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty. (Revelation 1:8)

Here is the major point we need to see here: leaders come and go. Generations are born and generations die. Societies and cultures undergo changes. But our God remains the same. He is continuous and constant from one generation to the next. The manner in which these books of the Bible are tied together remind us that He is the God of the ages.

So you and I can know that though seasons come and go in our lives, though we have ups and downs, though we have much joy and fulfillment in our lives one day and crushing disappointment the next, our God is still there.

3 He is a God who has a purpose.

When Moses killed an Egyptian, hid his body in the sand and wound up tending sheep for forty years on the other side of nowhere, it appeared that God's purpose for His people had been thwarted. But not so! When the Hebrew people refused to enter Canaan, it appeared that God's purpose had been rendered null and void. But not so! When Moses died, it must have appeared to the people that God had forsaken them. But not so!

God has a purpose! The purpose for the Hebrew people was only *delayed*, but not *defeated*! The people rebelled, and in their rebellion against Almighty God, they sinned. But the eternal purpose of God, first revealed to Abraham, marches on!

We learn from this that in our lives, as in the Book, there is the presence of God, leading and guiding through all that happens to us, good or bad. In the different "chapters" of our lives, there is one common theme which connects them all together, if we could but see it—the overriding, incomparable, unparalleled, unprecedented, unrivaled and unmatched love of God!

Just as God had a purpose in telling the story with such continuity, and just as God had a purpose in leading His people as He did, God also has a purpose in our lives today. God has a purpose for you, and God has a purpose for me.

Before we were born, the chapters began with "and." After we leave, the chapters will begin with "and." The permanence of God's purpose will flow on and on with perfect and uninterrupted continuity.

4 He is a God of grace and mercy.

If, in spite of all the rebellion, murmuring and sin on the part of the Hebrew people—if in spite of all that, God remained true to His purpose, then He must be a very loving, gracious and patient God. If, in spite of the way the people refused to follow Him without question, God still began the chapters with "and," connecting one with the other, then He must be a God of grace and mercy.

Why, the very fact that He even continued to *tell* the story is proof enough of His great patience!

This picture of God as being very patient and merciful is completely compatible with what we see elsewhere in the Scriptures:

But from everlasting to everlasting the Lord's love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children's children. (Psalm 103:17)

For great is your love, higher than the heavens; your faithfulness reaches to the skies. (Psalm 108:4)

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace. (Ephesians 1:7)

So here is the Good News—here is what should cross your mind every time you pick your Bible to read it: the same grace and mercy which God has demonstrated and lavished upon His people through the ages is the grace and mercy which He longs to pour out on you today.