



Challenge



"...but try the spirits whether they are of God..." (1 Jno. 4:1)

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Editorial...

Because of health problems over the last year, as well as the work load for the church and at school, I have been unable to keep up with *Challenge* as I had hoped that I would. My health problems go up and down, though I haven't been in the hospital as many times this year as I have in the last few years. I do hope that I will be able to get better in the coming months.

Our sister publication *Back to the Bible* is almost ready for publication again, and it will be focusing on man's salvation. It is vitally important that it gets out because we mail out about 1700 of that publication every quarter, and most of it goes to the Belle, MO area, though some of it is mailed out of area.

My written debate with Todd Greene over the age of the universe and the earth has begun and my first affirmative can be found at <http://www.challenge2.org/mcd1aff1prop.pdf> for those who are interested in reading it. We are now waiting for Todd's first rebuttal. This will be an extensive debate and only scientific evidence is allowed. One of the rules is that the Bible is not to be allowed in as evidence. I have been purchasing books and material for the last year and a half in preparation for this debate and when, finally, it took off, I found that I

desperately needed more.

Kyle Butt did an excellent job in his February debate with atheist Dan Barker. Andrea and I drove down to see it, but our little Tomtom got us lost up in the Appalachian Mountains and we didn't make it. That is all right because as we came to realize the room filled up pretty quickly and they turned a lot of people away at the doors. So we found a motel and sat and watched it over the internet. The chat (over Justin.TV) was interesting to watch as the debate progressed.

The debate can be ordered either from the World Video Bible School or Apologetics Press. It is a very interesting debate. It is a very difficult debate to purchase, however, because the demand for it has been over-whelming. The people who produced it didn't think that there would be that much of a demand for it. I ordered two copies of it when it first came out, one for my own library and one for the church here in Belle, and I was notified that they are back logged. So good luck on getting copies of it for your personal viewing, but it will be worth it when you can get it. jdm

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HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW YOUR BIBLE? (7)

Jerry D. McDonald

In *The Informer* (the bulletin for the Belle church of Christ) I started responding to a Bible quiz that Dan Barker has on his Freedom From Religion Foundation website. I spent six weeks responding to it and got part of the way, but because of the length of the quiz and the pressing issues of other works coming up at Belle, we have decided to move that discussion from there over to here. We will still make the same responses, and the same people will still read it. It is just that it will be in its proper venue. Now this is not to say that *The Informer* is not a proper venue for short articles on things of this nature, but it certainly is not for long and drawn out articles since other needs of the church have to be addressed week-by-week as we go along. So *Challenge* is the better venue for this kind of thing when it is going to be drawn out over a longer period of time.

In our last article we left off with Mr. Barker's question over who created evil. Since we have fully responded to it we will now go on to respond to the next one: "According to the bible, what is God not able to do? (A) Save the very worst sinners from hell. (B) Make a rock so huge he can't lift it. (C) Repel chariots of iron. (D) Make people tell lies." And of course the answer is, according to Dan Barker is "C" *Repel chariots of iron*. Now where is he getting this? If God can do all things then why couldn't he repel chariots of iron? Well one has to look at the context of the verse that Dan is talking about to see why he gives the answer that he has given. "c. Repel chariots of iron. "So much for omnipotence. "And the Lord was with Judah; and he drove out the inhabitants of the mountain; but could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley, because they had chariots of iron." (Judges 1:19)" (<http://www.ffrf.org/quiz/banswers.php>).

Now when we look up this passage and look at it in context we are going to see that "*Also Judah took Gaza with the coast thereof, and Askelon with the coast thereof, and Ekron with the coast thereof. And the LORD was with Judah; and he drove out the inhabitants of the mountain; but could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley, because they had*

chariots of iron" (Jdg 1:18-19). Now we see that Judah took Gazah, and Askelon and Ekron. Then the scriptures tell us that the Lord was with Judah, and he drove out all the inhabitants of the mountains, but he could not drive out the inhabitants of the valleys because they had chariots of iron. Adam Clarke wrote:

"Strange! were the iron chariots too strong for Omnipotence? The whole of this verse is improperly rendered. The first clause, The Lord was with Judah should terminate the 18th verse, and this gives the reason for the success of this tribe: The Lord was with Judah, and therefore he slew the Canaanites that inhabited Zephath, etc., etc. Here then is a complete period: the remaining part of the verse either refers to a different time, or to the rebellion of Judah against the Lord, which caused him to withdraw his support" (*Clarke's Commentaries, e-Sword*).

Now, when this was written it wasn't broken down in chapters and verses. So the breaking off of verses is often erroneous and sometimes will give the wrong sense of what is actually taking place. When you look further down at what is said in the following verses you see that the Israelites did sin and God had withdrawn his support from them because they quit doing his will.

It is strange that a man, who claims that he was once a true Christian, once felt the Holy Spirit, and that if he wasn't a true Christian, then no one is a true Christian couldn't even recognize the flaw of chapter and verse separation. Dan Barker is just like very other apostate who has ever turned his back on God. He never was a true Christian because he never obeyed the gospel of Christ. He never felt the Holy Spirit because the Holy Spirit doesn't literally touch people. Just because he was wrong, that does not make everyone else in the world wrong. We will continue in the next issue of *Challenge* to respond to what Mr. Barker says in his little quiz and hopefully all who read our answers will be able to see that Dan Barker isn't really free at all. He is the bond servant of Satan and just doesn't realize it yet. More to come. jdm

Biblical Archaeology

Louis Rushmore

Biblical archaeology continues to make significant contributions to the body of external evidence that confirms the Bible. Thereby, biblical archaeology reinforces the Bible-believer's confidence in the Divine inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible. Further, biblical archaeology persuades unbelievers to more closely examine the Bible message.

Kenneth A. Kitchen's article in the 1995 March/April issue of *Biblical Archaeology Review* presents several archaeological pieces of external evidence. First, he establishes a solid date--harmonious with both biblical text and archaeological discoveries--from which patriarchal and Jewish events can be dated confidently.

Kitchen associates the building of the city Ramesses by Israelite slaves in Exodus 1:11 with archaeological discoveries of the same period. The Merneptah stela chronicles military interaction between Egypt and Israel in Canaan, at a time which according to history and the biblical text postdates the exodus. This agreement affords the Bible student and the true biblical archaeologist a glimpse backward into patriarchy and forward into Judaism, for dating purposes.

An interesting piece of external evidence pertains to the price of slaves. Archaeological discoveries covering 2,000 years of history value slaves from a low of 10 shekels of silver to a high of 120 shekels of silver each. Various biblical references to the price of slaves correspond to the historical price of slaves in various periods (confirmed through archaeology). Accordingly, Joseph was sold for 20 shekels of silver (Genesis 37:28). See also references to 30 shekels of silver (Exodus 21:32) and 50 shekels of silver (2 Kings 15:20) for the price of a slave. Had the account of Joseph been written during the Persian period instead of when it purports to have occurred, Joseph would have been sold for 90 or 100 shekels of silver.

Greatly simplified in this article, the complexities of comparing the differences between contracts throughout the centuries also attest to the reliability of the Bible.

Contracts (covenants) that are recorded in the Old Testament (e.g., Genesis 14:13; 21:23-33; 26:29-31; 31:44-54; etc.) correspond to contracts of various historical periods identified through archaeology. This is another way that biblical chronology corresponds with biblical archaeology.

Add to the previous considerations that geographical-political alliances recorded in the Bible conform to the geography and governments discernible through archaeology. The specific Bible references detailing certain alliances many not be found through archaeology (e.g., Genesis 14), but the right names correspond to the right places and alliances typical of various historical periods.

Old Testament references to Egypt (e.g., contact with pharaohs by Abraham and later by Jacob) fit with the history of Egypt. Egyptian presence was in the right place at the right time to interact with God's people just as the Bible portrays. Biblical archaeology confirms this. Someone attempting to write patriarchal history out-of-time and pretending a much earlier date would be ill prepared to relate these facts correctly.

Further, the laws of inheritance differed from time to time throughout patriarchy and Judaism. Biblical references to inheritance laws (e.g., Genesis 49, equal distribution to sons; Deuteronomy 21:15-17, double portion for the oldest son) correspond to archaeological discoveries depicting inheritance laws in the respective historical periods.

Additionally, customs ascribed in the Bible to various peoples agree with archaeological evidence respecting the same periods. To the degree that customs differed from nation to nation and from generation to generation, the fabrication of histories by Bible writers and their assignment of their writings to earlier centuries would have been difficult to impossible. There is no reason to discount Bible narratives and not accept them as they represent themselves.

Since some Asian cultures have maintained accurate ancestral and narrative accounts for even a thousand years, similar Bible chronologies of family lines and events are very believable. This type of external evidence stands against the guesswork-scholarship of avowed enemies of the Bible.

Biblical archaeology reveals both events that are also recorded in the Bible and events that are not mentioned in the Bible, though the characters associated with these latter events are named in the biblical text. The Black Obelisk of the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III records tribute brought to him by other kings. One of these tribute-paying monarchs was the Israelite Jehu. He brought tin, gold and silver. Though Jehu is a biblical character, this particular event is not chronicled in the Bible.

An earlier mention of Israel during the reign of Shalmaneser appears on another stela, the Kurkh Monolith. Inscribed hereon is that Ahab contributed 2,000 chariots and 10,000 soldiers to an alliance of kings that was attempting to resist the conquering armies of Shalmaneser.

References such as these are not contradicted by the Bible. The Bible just does not mention them. We do not expect the Bible to record every historical event and it does not (see this principle in John 20:30).

Archaeology is an interpretive science. However, if presented honestly and if not colored with a liberal bias, biblical archaeology never contradicts the Bible. Sometimes archaeological discoveries, though depict events that are not specifically mentioned in the Bible. Further, the Bible records characters, places and events that have not been discovered by archaeologists. Yet, whenever the Bible and archaeology address the same things, they always concur.

The external evidence of biblical archaeology is a fitting companion to biblical internal evidence. Together they are unsurpassed faith-builders.

http://www.bible-infonet.org/bin/short_articles/apologetics/Archaeology.htm

THE COMMA JOHANNEUM Telling Tale of a Trinitarian Text Al Maxey

Dr. Charles Seymour (1885-1963), during his thirteen year tenure as president of *Yale University*, once observed, "We seek the truth, and we will endure the consequences." This is one of those "uncomfortable realities" associated with truth-seeking. When one initiates a quest for greater truth, and greater understanding of *known* truth, one also, whether knowingly or unknowingly, subjects himself to the caustic calumnies of those who are quite comfortable in the thought that they, and they *alone*, have already *fully arrived* with respect to the sum total of universal objective truth. One dares to challenge the *status quo*, and its *defenders*, at one's own peril, as many have painfully learned throughout history. Thus, those who seek truth must be willing to pay the price and suffer the consequences of such a journey of discovery. From a far more positive perspective, however, the resultant

benefits of such an inquiry are well worth the effort and attendant affliction.

One of the many areas in which it's often personally dangerous to engage in a process of intense examination for the purpose of determining truth is with respect to the accuracy of various passages within various versions of the Bible. *Textual Criticism* is a fascinating field of inquiry, but it has also generated its share of controversy, especially from those rigid religionists and factionists within Christendom who do not take kindly to *any* challenge of their accepted perceptions and positions. To doubt *them* is to doubt *God Himself*; differ with *them* and you have thereby forever declared yourself "in league with the *devil* and his demons." *They themselves* have become the "Standard of Measure" for all Christians upon the face of the earth; *their* views are the only correct views; *their* practices the only ones approved by God. *They* are the only ones going to heaven. All others are

"fodder for the fire." Somewhat interestingly, a significant number of these people have embraced the *King James Version* as THE sole *authoritative* Bible for the world today. Some virtually regard it as "inspired of God" [[Reflections #88](#) -- ***The Bible Used By Paul: Analysis of the King James Version***]. All *other* versions are compared to and contrasted with **it**, and are then found either somewhat worthy (such as the *ASV*) or utterly wanting (such as the *NIV*). If a passage that is found in the *KJV* is removed from the "modern versions," then this is viewed as some kind of "Satanic conspiracy" to *undermine* God's Word. All of which leads us to the infamous ***Comma Johanneum***.

This Latin phrase refers to a short clause (*comma*) within the writings of the apostle John, specifically the additional wording found in the *KJV*'s rendering of **1 John 5:7-8**, a passage often used in support of the doctrine of the Trinity. The following is the reading from the *KJV* (with the "Comma Johanneum" in bold type) -- "For there are three that bear record **in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth**, the spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one." This *Comma* is also found in the *New King James Version*. Almost all other versions of the Scriptures, however, *omit* the *Comma*, which has led some to charge those who produced these newer versions with denying deity, and specifically: denying the doctrine of the Trinity. *Wikipedia*, an online encyclopedia, states: "This passage is an explicit reference to the Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and for this reason some Christians are resistant to the elimination of the *Comma* from modern biblical translations." Albert Barnes, in his classic *Notes on the Bible*, observes, "The clear testimony which the *Comma* seems to bear to the doctrine of the Trinity has made that portion of the Christian church which holds the doctrine reluctant in the highest degree to abandon it" [from *e-Sword*].

Nevertheless, there are a great many extremely serious problems associated with this passage, and this has led scholars searching for greater *truth* and *accuracy* to

challenge the place of this passage within the inspired New Covenant writings. Which in turn has raised a raucous outcry from those who are staunch supporters of the passage (and more particularly of the *KJV* within which it is found). The late Adam Clarke (1760-1832) commented, "The seventh verse of the fifth chapter of 1 John has given rise to more theological disputes than any other portion of the sacred writings. Advocates and antagonists have arisen in every quarter of the civilized world" [*Clarke's Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 927]. In a thoroughly fascinating book titled "*The King James Only Controversy*" by James B. White (with a Foreword by Dr. Norman Geisler), the author writes, "Most *KJV Only* preachers and believers make the acceptance of this particular passage *the* test of 'orthodoxy.' If your Bible does *not* have this passage, you are in deep trouble" [p. 60]. Apparently, most believers are in "deep trouble," for the *vast majority* of Bibles today do NOT include the *Comma Johanneum*. Why? Because the evidence that it is spurious is absolutely overwhelming! Indeed, it is almost impossible to find a single reputable biblical scholar in the world today who will endorse this passage as authentic. The evidence against it is *that* compelling!

The imminent Greek scholar/author Dr. Daniel B. Wallace, in his work "[The Textual Problem in 1 John 5:7-8](#)," stated the following: "This reading, the infamous *Comma Johanneum*, has been known in the English-speaking world through the King James translation. However, the evidence -- both external and internal -- is decidedly *against* its authenticity." He then proceeds to lay out that evidence in quite some detail. So also does one of the most important Greek scholars of recent times, Dr. B. F. Westcott, who, in his scholarly commentary "The Epistles of St. John -- The Greek Text with Notes," devoted *eight* pages to the evidence refuting the authenticity of this passage [pp. 202-209]. Yet another very highly respected Greek scholar, Dr. Kenneth S. Wuest, in his "Word Studies from the Greek New Testament," declared, "There is general agreement among textual critics that the contents of this verse are spurious, and do not belong to the original text" [vol. 2, *In These Last Days*, p. 176]. Dr. W. Robertson Nicoll, in his monumental, masterful work "The Expositor's Greek Testament," characterized the *Comma* as "a Latin interpolation, certainly spurious" [vol. 5, p. 195]. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* calls it "a late gloss with no merit" [vol. 12, p. 353].

Interestingly, *The Pulpit Commentary* refuses to even regard the addition as even being *worthy of comment*, saying, "It will be assumed here, without discussion, that the remainder of this verse and the first clause of verse 8 are spurious" [vol. 22, p. 140]. World-renowned Greek scholar Dr. Bruce M. Metzger, within the pages of his *fabulous* work "A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament," informed his readers -- "That these words are spurious and have no right to stand in the New Testament is *certain*" [p. 715]. R. C. H. Lenski, in his Commentary on the Epistles of John, declared the *Comma* "completely spurious," and then said, "The R.V. is right in not even noting in the margin the interpolation found in the A.V." [p. 528].

The Greek scholar, Dr. A. T. Robertson, in his highly regarded work "Word Pictures in the Greek New Testament," was extremely blunt in his statement of disgust for this *Comma*. He declared that it found its way into the text "**by the stupidity of Erasmus**" [from *e-Sword*]. Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536), the great Dutch humanist and theologian, did indeed play a rather significant role in the ultimate inclusion of this passage in the *King James Version*, although that version would not be published until almost a century after his death. This raises some interesting questions with regard to just *how* this particular passage found its way into the text of John's first epistle. What exactly led to its inclusion? It is a fascinating journey about which entire books have been written. Obviously we cannot go into that amount of depth in this current article, but let me take just a bit of your time to trace the major points in this historical saga. I think you'll find it enlightening.

First of all, it should be noted that "there is no sure evidence of this reading in any Greek manuscript until the 1500s" [Dr. Daniel B. Wallace, *The Textual Problem in 1 John 5:7-8*]. It is, simply stated -- **utterly absent** from **all** the early Greek manuscripts of the NT. Dr. Albert Barnes states the obvious: "It is incredible that a *genuine* passage of the New Testament should be missing in *all* the early Greek manuscripts" [*Barnes' Notes*, from *e-Sword*]. Incredible indeed! Furthermore,

"the passage is quoted by **none** of the Greek Fathers, who, had they *known* about it, would most certainly have employed it in the Trinitarian controversies" [Dr. Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, p. 716]. During the era of these Church Fathers there were a number of genuinely significant controversies involving, among other things, the doctrine of the Trinity -- the **Sabellian** and **Arian** "heresies," for example, just to name a couple. And yet, not one single Church Father *ever* appealed to this passage in order to validate his refutation of these teachings, something these men most assuredly *would* have done had they been *aware* of such a passage. It was also unknown among the early Latin Church Fathers as well. This passage is *also* absent from the manuscripts of all the ancient versions of the New Testament (including the Syriac, Coptic, Armenian, Ethiopic, Arabic and Slavonic). It *did* find its way into *some* Latin texts, but *not* in the Old Latin text or in the Vulgate as originally issued by Jerome (or even in the revision of Alcuin).

- "The earliest instance of the passage being quoted as a part of the actual text of the Epistle is in a fourth century Latin treatise entitled **Liber Apologeticus** (chapter 4), attributed either to the Spanish heretic **Priscillian** (died about 385) or to his follower **Bishop Instantius**. Apparently the gloss arose when the original passage was understood to symbolize the Trinity (through the mention of the three witnesses: spirit, water and blood), an interpretation which may have been written first as a marginal note that afterwards found its way into the text" [Metzger, p. 716].

It should be noted that the above was not an actual NT manuscript, but rather a document produced by a man who simply quoted the passage in question in John's first epistle. No mention was made within that document as to the source of this addition to the passage, however most scholars feel, as was noted by Dr. Metzger, that some scribe, while studying his copy of the manuscript, may have made a note in the margin that the wording of John's text (spirit, water and blood) might lend itself well to a Trinitarian interpretation and application (Father, Son and Spirit). As has happened many times before, such marginal notations have found

their way into subsequent copies of the NT text through carelessness of copyists (and, at times, by the willful design of a copyist with a point to prove). Some proponents of the *Comma* additionally claim that **Cyprian** "actually quoted the form that appears in the KJV" [Dr. Daniel B. Wallace, [The Comma Johanneum and Cyprian](#)]. Cyprian, the Bishop of Carthage in North Africa, and one of the more important Christian writers of his time, died a martyr's death in Carthage on September 14, 258 A.D. If the claim is true that he quoted the *Comma* in the same form as appears in the *KJV*, then this would be important, as it would place the passage within a century and a half of the time when it was originally written by the apostle John. Unfortunately for the defenders of the *Comma Johanneum*, however, Cyprian does *not* quote the passage in question, but merely comments upon the three witnesses mentioned by John (spirit, water, blood) in language similar to the *Comma*. Cyprian, clearly, was not quoting the *Comma* as though it were a part of the text, but providing his own insight into the text and perceiving how it could be given a Trinitarian interpretation, a fact which Dr. Daniel B. Wallace, as well as a good many *other* writers, makes abundantly clear in his exegesis of Cyprian's comments. "Thus, that Cyprian *interpreted* 1 John 5:7-8 to refer to the Trinity is likely; but that he saw the Trinitarian formula *in the text* is rather unlikely" [Dr. Wallace]. The online encyclopedia *Wikipedia*, citing this very same study, states, "Wallace is following the current standard critical editions of the New Testament which consider Cyprian a witness *against* the *Comma*." In other words, most scholars today feel that Cyprian actually serves as proof that the *Comma* is NOT legitimate, rather than proof that it IS.

- Even if we allow that Cyprian *did* actually QUOTE the *Comma* (which he didn't), rather than just comment in similar language upon the three witnesses, this still leaves some huge questions and doubts. These are expressed well by Adam Clarke --- "I seriously ask every impartial judge whether a passage found in no ancient Greek manuscript, quoted by no Greek father, and contained in no other ancient version than the

Latin (and not in all copies of this), is therefore to be pronounced genuine merely because one Latin father of the three first centuries, who was bishop of Carthage, where the Latin version only was used, and where Greek was unknown, has quoted it? Under these circumstances, should we conclude that the passage stood originally in the Greek autograph of Saint John? Certainly not!" [*Clarke's Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 931]. I think you will find most biblical scholars agree.

Somewhere around the year 800 A.D., the spurious *Comma*, as it appeared in chapter four of the fourth century homily mentioned above [*Liber Apologeticus*], was worked into a few later copies of the Vulgate (although it never appeared in Jerome's original Vulgate). This passage, taken from these later Latin copies, was then "back-translated" into Greek at a later date, thus generating a very small number of Greek manuscripts with the *Comma* added, most appearing in the margin. "Thus, there is no sure evidence of this reading in any Greek manuscript until the 1500s; each such reading was apparently composed *after* Erasmus' Greek New Testament was published in 1516" [Dr. Daniel Wallace]. In the first two editions of Erasmus' Greek New Testament -- the first edition appearing in 1516 and the second in 1519 -- he did NOT include the *Comma*. This brought about a flurry of criticism from those churchmen who had embraced the *Comma* from the recent Latin versions, and who had been making use of the *Comma* in support of the doctrine of the Trinity, which had become a major doctrine of the *Roman Catholic Church*. For example, **Edward Lee** and **Diego Lopez Zuniga** launched a number of vicious attacks against Erasmus for daring to leave this passage out of his first two editions of the Greek NT. They accused him of promoting the heresy of **Arianism**. In response, Erasmus challenged them to "produce a Greek manuscript that has what is missing in my edition."

Shortly thereafter just such a Greek manuscript suddenly and miraculously appeared from out of nowhere!! It is known today as the **Codex Montfortianus** [aka: "Dubliniensis," aka: "Britannicus"], and is currently housed at Trinity College in Dublin, Ireland. Almost nobody, including Erasmus, regarded the work as legitimate, but he was true to his word, and since

a Greek manuscript was produced that contained the *Comma*, he included it in his third edition which was published in 1522. This third edition, unfortunately, would go on to become the primary Greek basis for the later *King James Version*, "thereby fixing the *Comma* firmly in the English language Scriptures for centuries" [Wikipedia]. The great tragedy in all of this, of course, is that the passage is based upon a *forgery*!! The codex that miraculously appeared was nothing but a fraud, prepared solely for the purpose of forcing Erasmus to alter his third edition to favor the doctrine of the Trinity. It is for this reason that the noted Greek scholar Dr. A. T. Robertson so boldly declared that the *Comma* found its way into the text "by the *stupidity* of Erasmus" [from e-Sword]. Dr. Charles Ellicott, in his commentary on the passage, wrote that we owe the *Comma* "solely to the reluctant deference paid by Erasmus to unlearned current opinion. There is hardly a passage in all literature more demonstrably spurious!" [vol. 8, p. 472]. "In the final analysis, Erasmus probably altered the text because of politico-theologico-economic concerns: he did not want his reputation ruined, nor his *Novum Instrumentum* to go unsold" [Dr. Daniel Wallace].

The "KJV Only" crowd, however, continues to *blindly* and *obstinately* insist upon the authenticity of the spurious *Comma Johanneum*, even though there is about as much objective evidence for such as there is for a *flat earth* (and, yes, there is a society of

advocates for *this* as well ... go figure). Dr. Daniel Wallace observed, "Sadly, neither empirical *evidence* nor *reason* can dissuade these people from their views. The irony is that their very clinging to *tradition* at all costs (namely, of an outmoded translation which, though a literary monument in its day, is now like a Model T on the Autobahn) emulates Roman Catholicism in its regard for tradition. If the King James translators knew that this would be the result nearly four hundred years after the completion of their work, they'd be writhing in their graves." Even the Catholic Church, in more recent times, is beginning to question the *Comma*, as they should. On January 13, 1897 it was decreed by the "Holy Office" that the theologians of the Catholic Church could not "with safety" ever deny or call into question the authenticity of the *Comma*. That has now changed. On June 2, 1926, Pope Pius XI decreed that the *Comma Johanneum* was officially "open to dispute." Since that time, the updated *Nova Vulgata* (which is an edition of the Vulgate published in 1979) and the English language version used by the Catholics, the *New American Bible*, have both chosen to remove the *Comma*. In time, hopefully, this *spurious addition* to God's inspired Word will be *eliminated entirely* from all versions. This will only come when people are willing to open their eyes to truth, and dare to stand firmly for that truth regardless of the consequences. That forward progress is only hindered by the stubborn resistance of those entrenched in their tradition. May God help us all to increasingly counter such ignominious ignorance.

<http://www.zianet.com/maxey/reflx379.htm>

THE COMMA JOHANNEUM

A Response

Jerry McDonald

In the last 2008 issue of the magazine *Reflections* editor, Al Maxey, wrote an article entitled "The Comma Johanneum, Telling Tale of a Trinitarian Text" which was intended to prove that 1 John 5:7's "For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one" is not authentic. This is a text that has been hotly debated since Erasmus left it out of his

first edition of the *Textus Receptus*, and it will not likely go away anytime soon.

The science of textual criticism is undoubtedly the best way to study the scriptures that we have. However, not everyone has the tools to do an intense study in that area so most are left with nothing more than the translation that they have before them, and the hope that the translators knew what they were doing when they made the translation. However, for a conclusive study of

this text, we are going to need a little more than translations. We can get the translations and see what they say, and most of the translations are going to leave verse seven (which has come to be known as the “Comma Johanneum”) out. This is simply the verse that says: “*For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.*” The only translations that will have it will be the King James Version and the New King James Version. The American Standard Version will have it set aside and will have a notation that most mss (or manuscripts) don’t have the phrase. However, all other translations will follow the Westcott-Hort Greek Text and leave the phrase out. The American Standard follows the Westcott-Hort, but it also leans towards the KJV, which follows the *Textus Receptus*, at various times. So we will need to get into textual criticism in order to see whether or not this passage is authentic. This is the only way that we are going to be able to tell. In this part of the article we will look at objections to the authenticity of these passages and then we will look at the evidence in favor of it.

(1) Some object to the passage because it has Jesus witnessing to himself and John 5:31 says that he cannot witness to himself “If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true.” This passage does not mean, in any way, that Jesus could not be a witness of himself; it only meant that Jesus could not be his only witness.

Jesus did, on occasion, witness of himself as we see in Mt. 26:63, 64 when he was asked if he was the Son of God he responded with “Thou hast said....” In other words, he was admitting to being the Son of God. Here and other places he testifies of his Sonship to God and in 1 John 5:7,8 he has four other witnesses; the Father, the Holy Spirit, the water and the blood. His testimony alone was not sufficient to sustain his position that he was the Son of God; he needed added witnesses to corroborate it.

(2) This verse is objected to on the grounds that it does nothing for the text, rather it breaks the thread of the argument that John is making. However, upon consideration of the text, it is clearly seen that if one takes this verse out of the text

that there is an abrupt interruption. Notice what the text would look like without this text, “*And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth. And there are three that bear witness in earth....*” One can immediately see that something is missing, and some translators see this problem and they get around this problem by leaving out the words “in earth” so that the passage reads

“*And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth. And there are three that bear witness the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.*”

This passage simply doesn’t make sense. [1] It tells us that the Spirit bears witness because the Spirit is truth. [2] It tells us that there are three that bear witness, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood. [3] It tells us that these three agree in one.

{1} Why does John mention that there are three that bear witness without telling us where those three are?

{2} Why does John say that these three agree in one?

Those are questions that need to be resolved before this issue can be settled. In the first place the words “in earth” are found in at least some manuscripts because Wuest said “The words ‘in earth’ are not found in the best (emphasis mine jdm) manuscripts” (*Word Studies in the Greek New Testament, Vol. II, p. 176*). What many scholars are calling the best manuscripts are the codex B (the Siniaticus) and the codex a (the Vaticanus) which are, admittedly, the most corrupt. It is easy to see why the 1 Jno. 5:7 opponents don’t want the words “in earth” in verse 8, because those words would imply that there were also witnesses in heaven. However, taking the words out of the text does not solve this problem because the problem remains, you still have the three witnesses bearing witness and agreeing in one. What has the three witnesses agreeing in one got to do with the Spirit bearing witness because the Spirit is truth? Nothing! Without verse 7 (or what has come to be known as “The Comma Johanneum”) the passage is distorted, but with it in place the thought is smooth. Compare with both the comma and without.

With the Comma Johanneum

“This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth. For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one” (1Jn 5:6-8).

Without the Comma Johanneum

“This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth. And there are three that bear witness, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one” (1 Jn. 5:6, 8).

You can see that without the Comma Johanneum something seems to be missing. Verse 6 speaks of Christ coming by water and by blood. It also speaks of the Spirit bearing witness because the Spirit is truth. Then verse 8 has said “and there are three that bear witness...and these three agree in one.” Where did they agreeing in one come from? Why didn’t it just say, “and these three agree”? But it didn’t, it said “and these three agree **in one**.” Now without verse seven something is missing. Where did the three bearing witness come from? Verse 8 makes no sense without the comma Johanneum.

(3) Another objection is that it was not found in any Greek manuscript before Erasmus made the challenge that if it could be found in a Greek manuscript he would include it in his next revision of the TR. [A] It needs to be understood that if there was no evidence for its existence there would have been no problem caused when Erasmus left it out of his first edition. However, when he left it out, the omission was brought to his attention: “On a number of fronts, therefore, Erasmus had left himself open to a number of attacks. One attack concerned his omission of the Trinitarian formula in 1 John 5:7” (*The King James Version Debate*, p. 34). When this omission was brought to his attention he promised that if it could be found in a Greek manuscript he would

include it in his next edition. One year later it was found in the “Codex Miniscule 61” which some believe was made just for the purpose of getting Erasmus to include it in his next edition. [B] However, it was already in a Greek manuscript which preceded Erasmus; that was the Complutensian Polyglot of 1514. Now Carson admits that it was in that manuscript, but he believes it was there because the translators relied heavily on the Latin Vulgate (Ibid, p. 61).

(4) One final objection is that John never used the words “Father, and the Word” in the same sentence, but those who contend for this have obviously never read John 1:14 “*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among them and they beheld his glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.*” That objection is immediately taken out.

Now we can look at the evidence in favor of the comma. The Latin Vulgate had this passage in it as far back as 800 A.D. or so, and some of the Old Latin versions had it in them as far back as 500 A.D. Now while these weren’t Greek manuscripts they were versions that went back some where about 200 years younger than two of the oldest Greek manuscripts (4th century). And as we have already established these two manuscripts, though they are the oldest, they are also without a doubt the most corrupt, manuscripts extant.

Some argue that because it was not in either of the Syriac versions (one of which is believed to have been written in the first century) it is not genuine. It needs to be pointed out that an omission here does not necessitate spuriousness. It was found in the Old Latin versions going back as far as 500 A.D.,. It was found in the Codex Miniscule 61, the miniscule 88, a twelfth century manuscript, the Complutensian Polyglot and another manuscript variously dated to the fourteenth or seventeenth century.

Although none of the Greek church fathers quoted from it, Alford tells us that it was “supposed to be alluded to or cited by Tert Cypr” (Alford’s Greek New Testaments, Vol IV p. 503). Tertullian lived around 200 A.D. and Cyprian lived around 250 A.D.,. There were others who cited this verse such as Athanasius around 350 A.D.,. Alford continued to say that it was “clearly cited by Vig, Fulg” (Ibid). Vigilus lived during the fifth century and Fulgentius, according to Gill cited it in “the beginning of the

sixth century against the Arians, without any scruple or hesitation" (*The King James Version Debate*, p. 59).

Gill also tells us that it "stands in the Vulgate Latin edition of the London Polyglot Bible: and the Latin translation, which bears the name of Jerom," (*Exposition of the Entire Bible, I John*, p. 101). Now Carson, the author of the King James Version Debate disagrees with this, but Carson does not deny that Jerome complained about unfaithful interpreters who did not put the verse in their versions. Why would Jerome complain about translators not putting the verse in their versions if he didn't have it in his? Gill also wrote further about versions and manuscript evidence:

"And as to its being wanting in some Greek manuscripts, as the Alexandrian, and others, it need only be said, that it is to be found in *many others*; it is in an old British copy, and in the Complutensian edition, the compilers of which made use of *various copies*; and out of sixteen ancient copies of Robert Stephens's, *nine of them had it*" (*Exposition on the Entire Bible, I John*, p. 101).

So we can see that all the way from 200 A.D. to present we have quotations from either people such as the Latin church fathers and/or manuscript evidence and version evidence for 1 John 5:7. I can see why those who despise the KJV would want it to be spurious, and I can see why the one God holiness would want it that way, but I cannot see why a faithful child of God could look at the evidence and honestly say that this passage does not rightfully belong in the text.

Now we want to look at some details of Mr. Maxey's article; details that we have not already covered in the body of this article. He has listed several commentators and lexicographers who have stated that they believe that this passage is fraudulent, but that is all right. We knew from the outset that there were those who held to that position. Mr. Maxey made sure to point out that most Bibles didn't have the comma in it, and of course we readily admit that. But we have some commentators of our own who, of course, agree with us. John Calvin wrote:

"7. There are three than bear record in heaven The whole of this verse has been by some omitted. Jerome thinks that this has happened through design rather than through mistake, and that indeed only on the part of the Latins. But as even the Greek copies do not agree, I dare not assert any thing on the subject. **Since, however, the passage flows better when this clause is added, and as I see that it is found in the best and most approved copies, I am inclined to receive it as the true reading.** 1 And the meaning would be, that God, in order to confirm most abundantly our faith in Christ, testifies in three ways that we ought to acquiesce in him. For as our faith acknowledges three persons in the one divine essence, so it is called in so really ways to Christ that it may rest on him" (*John Calvin's Verse Commentary 1Jo 5:7, Sword Searcher Bible Program*).

Matthew Poole wrote:

Ver. 7. Having mentioned the Spirit's testifying in the close of 1Jo 5:6, he returns to give us in order, in these two verses, the whole testimony of the truth of Christianity, which he reduces to two ternaries of witnesses. The matter of their testimony is the same with that of their faith who are born of God, that Jesus is the Son of God, and the Messiah, as may be collected from what was said before, 1Jo 5:1,5, and what is said afterwards, 1Jo 5:9. What they believe, is no other thing than what these testify. For the first three, in heaven, that is not said to signify heaven to be the place of their testifying; for though the same thing concerning Jesus be also no doubt testified to the glorious inhabitants of that world, yet that is not the apostle's present scope, but to show what reason we have, who inhabit this world, to believe Jesus to be Christ, and the Son of God.

In heaven therefore is to be referred to three, not to bear record, or witness; as if the text were read, which it may as well: There are three in heaven who bear witness; the design being to represent their immediate testifying from thence unto us, or the glorious, heavenly, majestic manner of their testifying. So the Father testified of the man Jesus by immediate voice from heaven, at his baptism and transfiguration: This is my Son, &c. The eternal Word owned its union with him, in that glory with which it so eminently clothed his humanity, and which visibly shone

through it in the holy mount, whereof this apostle was a spectator, and whereto he seems to refer in his Gospel, Joh 1:14: We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, i.e. such as sufficiently testified him to be so, even the very Son of God. And the Holy Ghost testified, descending as a dove in a visible glorious appearance upon him, at his baptism also.

And these three are one, viz. not only agreeing in their testimony, as 1Jo 5:8, but in unity of nature: an express testimony of the triune Deity, **by whatsoever carelessness or ill design left out of some copies, but sufficiently demonstrated by many most ancient ones, to belong to the sacred text: of which L. Brug. Not. in loc., with the other critics, and at large, Dr. Hammond**" (*Matthew Poole's Commentary on the Holy Bible 1Jo 5:7, Sword Searcher Bible Program*).

It was also commented on in William Burkett's Expository Notes, and it was found in the Geneva Bible. The lack of evidence is not what keeps this passage from being accepted by most. There are passages that have far less manuscript and version evidence that is accepted other than this. What keeps this from being accepted so

readily is the fact that this is a clear scripture to the triune nature of God; that there are three persons in the Godhead. Some argue that we don't need it to prove that there are three persons in the Godhead, so leave it out, but with it there is no doubt because it is written so clearly that there can be no mistake about it. And if it is genuine no one has the right to leave it out.

Mr. Maxey uses it in his criticisms of the KJV, not because it bothers him one way or the other, but because he wants more ammo in his arsenal against the most accurate translation we have on earth: The King James Version. Now, he can call me a KJV Only advocate, but he knows it isn't true because he knows that those people consider the KJV as being free of error; I don't! I just don't believe that this is one of them. I believe that there is enough evidence to show that we ought to, at least, look at this passage before throwing it out. This story that the only Greek manuscript that ever had the comma in it before Erasmus made his challenge, is for the birds. I have heard that story so much and, maybe there was a time when brethren could get by with publishing that story, but with the internet and the ability we have to access information; there is no excuse for one to rely on such inaccuracies any longer. This article certainly didn't take Al's article piece by piece, as it wasn't designed to do that. I reprinted his (with his permission) and published mine (adding some to it) to give another side to this idea that 1 Jno. 5:7 is fraudulent.

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