

BOOK REVIEW
of
Paul D. Wegner,
The Journey from Texts to Translations: The Origin and Development of the Bible,
Baker Academic, 2000.

This book is in the Evangel Library,
and this review is presented by Larry D. Paarmann.

Many of the books we read may be almost entirely text, and while they may contain ideas of lasting value the physical production is relatively simple, consisting of only the printed word. Once in awhile we come across a book the physical production of which is impressive, and represents a production effort and accomplishment that puts it in a special class. Such is the book under review. It presents a wealth of information about the origin, development, canonization, and transmission of the Bible, and about English translations of the Bible, and it does so with a large number of photographs, tables, drawings, etc. It also includes detailed notes, a general index, a Scripture index, and a detailed list of credits, all of which suggest that the book is intended for serious study and that care has been taken to assist the reader in doing so. There are over 120 figures in the book, and over 100 tables.

The book is divided into five parts. *Part 1 Preliminary Matters regarding the Bible* consists of four chapters. *Part 2 Canonization of the Bible* consists of five chapters. *Part 3 Transmission of the Bible* consists of four chapters. *Part 4 Early Translations of the Bible* consists of two chapters. And *Part 5 English Translations of the Bible* consists of five chapters. The author, Paul Wegner, has a Ph.D. from the University of London, and is professor of Bible at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago.

In Chapter 1, *The Bible as the Word of God*, Wegner says that “In spite of its age the Bible remains the most popular and widely read book in the world with more than one hundred million new copies, in whole or in part, produced every year.” Elsewhere I heard or read that when computing best-seller lists such as does the *New York Times*, the Bible is excluded as it would otherwise always be in first place. The popularity, importance, and impact upon this world of the Bible can hardly be exaggerated. As Isaiah said so long ago, “The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our Lord stands forever,” and also, “For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, And do not return there, But water the earth, And make it bring forth and bud, That it may give seed to the sower And bread to the eater, So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper *in the thing* for which I sent it.” Nevertheless it is natural to wonder about how the Bible came about, and how it has been preserved and transmitted down through the ages. And that, of course, is what this book by Wegner is about.

In *Part 1* Wegner points out that approximately one-third “of the New Testament is composed of Old Testament quotations and allusions.” Clearly then, it is difficult to consider the New Testament in isolation from the Old. Another basic principle that Wegner points out is that there may well be much greater similarity between New Testament times and now than many believe. He quotes William Ramsay as follows: “Almost all stylish women of the time wore lipstick. Dyed hair (especially red or blond) and permanent waves were in fashion . . . Beach resorts were crowded each summer. Astronomers not only knew that the earth was round but had calculated the distance around it as being twenty-four thousand miles and the distance to the sun as ninety-two million miles.” This is a brief sample of *Part 1*.

In *Part 2* Wegner states concerning Old Testament books, “This point is crucial: the books did not receive their authority because they were placed into the canon; rather, they were recognized by the nation of Israel as having divine authority and were therefore included in the canon.” A similar statement can be made concerning the canonization of New Testament books.

One of the interesting observations in *Part 3* is that “As Christians increasingly used the Septuagint for their Scriptures in defense of their faith, the Jews out of necessity began to distance themselves from it” and “It is interesting that a work which the Jewish people originally esteemed so highly should eventually be rejected and condemned by them.”

Quoting Sir Frederic Kenyon, Wegner says that “the general result of all these discoveries and all this study is to strengthen the proof of the authenticity of the Scriptures, and our conviction that we have in our hands, in substantial integrity, the veritable Word of God.”