

# X marks the spot (1)

Robin de Jongh

*This issue welcomes the start of a new series in Bible Workshop. We may sometimes wonder how to get the best out of our Bible study. This and future articles show what clues there are in the text that enable us to ask the right question. Worked examples illustrate how to proceed to answer the question.*

**T**HE WAY to study Scripture, I am sure, is to ask questions. But whenever I suggest this to anyone, the question comes back, But how do I know which questions to ask? Well, it's surprisingly easy once you realise that God has written not only the answers but also the questions! In fact, He has left us with 'X's marking the spot where we ought to dig. This is a series of short articles where we will explore the markers God uses in His Scripture by means of worked examples. We shall discover that God consistently leaves us obvious clues to where He has hidden the best treasure. And once we see that, we will have confidence that our Bible learning is not random, but a God-guided affair.

"It is the glory of God to conceal a thing; but the honour of kings is to search out a matter" (Prov. 25:2, AV).\*

## Examples

- 1 Apparent misquotations
- 2 The nonsensical (for example: garments of several fibres; widows' mites)
- 3 Advice that cannot be followed in practice (for example: take up the cross; hate father and mother; Law of Moses)
- 4 'Unnecessary' detail (for example: 153 fishes; extra place names)
- 5 Repeat, repeat, repeat
- 6 Where was he when he said/wrote this?

## 1. Apparent misquotations

### Introduction

Some of the best treasure, and the easiest to discover, is found by digging at the site of what seem to be misquotations. So whenever you see a New Testament passage quoting the Old, go back and check whether it is the same. If it has been changed, God wants you to dig to find out why.

### How to do it

- (a) Find a 'misquoted' passage of Scripture
- (b) Isolate the words/phrases in the passage that have changed
- (c) Study these words/phrases by looking for other occurrences in Scripture
- (d) Ask, Do any of these have the same context? What you will then have is two initial passages (a quote and quoted), and one or more related passages that God intends you to link to the others. You can now study the contexts of these passages together to find the treasure. This should, of course, be done prayerfully.

### Worked example

Let us demonstrate this process by looking at Hebrews 10:5:

"Therefore, when he came into the world, he said: 'Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a *body You have prepared for me*'".

By looking in the margin of a cross-referenced Bible, we find it appears to be quoted wrongly from Psalm 40:6:

"Sacrifice and offering You did not desire; *my ears You have opened*".

The equivalent altered phrase is in italics. We now have two phrases with which to form a search.

### Looking afresh

We have now completed the first two steps (a) and (b) above. I am using a Bible text search program called OnLine Bible to perform step (c), but you could use any Bible software, the website [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com), or a concordance. I found the following, searching for the words 'ear' and 'open':

First, the words appear together in Psalm 49:4: "I will incline mine *ear* to a parable: I will *open* my dark saying upon the harp" (AV).

Looking at the context, David explains that the man who hears not "is like the beasts that perish" (vv. 12,20). Thus, in order not to perish (i.e., to gain an immortal body, unlike the beastlike

\* Quotations from the NKJV except where indicated otherwise.

body of a man who does not listen) he will open his ears to God's words.

Secondly, in Job 33:16 Elihu explains how the instruction of God is given and sealed up within men:

- 14 For God may speak in one way, or in another,  
Yet man does not perceive it.  
15 In a dream, in a vision of the night,  
When deep sleep falls upon men,  
While slumbering on their beds,  
16 Then He *opens the ears* of men,  
And seals their instruction.  
17 In order to turn man from his deed,  
And conceal pride from man,  
18 He keeps back his soul from the Pit,  
And his life from perishing by the sword.  
19 Man is also chastened with pain on his bed,  
And with strong pain in many of his bones.

So God seals His instruction within men's hearts by dreams and visions, and secondly by chastening and pain. This process Elihu describes as 'opening the ears'.

Thirdly, in Job 36:10,15 Elihu presses home this message to Job:

- 8 And if they are bound in fetters,  
Held in the cords of affliction,  
9 Then He tells them their work and their transgressions—  
That they have acted defiantly.  
10 He also *opens their ear* to instruction,  
And commands that they turn from iniquity.

He is reminding Job of God's ways of binding His servants in "cords of affliction" so that they might turn from pride and the way that leads to iniquity. Now notice the following verse:

- 12 But if they do not obey,  
They shall perish by the sword,  
And they shall die without knowledge.

That is, they will be "like the beasts that perish". Elihu is saying the same as David in Psalm 49, so we know we have correctly linked passages here. The Spirit intends us to put them alongside each other. Let's go on just a little further:

- 13 But the hypocrites in heart store up wrath;  
They do not cry for help when He binds them.  
14 They die in youth,  
And their life ends among the perverted persons.  
15 He delivers the poor in their affliction,  
And *opens their ears* in oppression.

The lesson of Elihu therefore is, If you give up in your affliction and cease to listen, you will die like the next man. But if you humble yourself and *cry out* for answers, He will deal with you in a special way and teach you His secrets of life.

So both David and Elihu are saying that it is by listening to the Word of God that we are changed to be eternal from within. Without it we are "like the beasts that perish", as David phrases it. And Elihu has further introduced the idea that it is often by submitting to chastening that we learn the most.

Next, in Isaiah 50:5 we see exactly the same theme, and this time it is another prophecy of Christ:

- 5 The Lord GOD has *opened my ear*;  
And I was not rebellious,  
Nor did I turn away.  
6 I gave my back to those who struck me,  
And my cheeks to those who plucked out the beard;  
I did not hide my face from shame and spitting.

Jesus would be the man that submitted entirely, unquestioningly, to chastening. And this was how God opened his ear. I think we are now ready to draw some conclusions.

### Re-examining the verses

Looking again at Psalm 40:6, the verse quoted in Hebrews 10, we find the context now makes complete sense. God prepared a body for Jesus first by the suffering (in faith) of all the Bible characters whose lives were recorded for Christ's learning. This was the Word of God he read as a child, which formed his character. Secondly, that Word was combined with his own chastening by the hand of his Father, so that instruction was truly 'sealed' within him. It was his open ear to the Word that made him (his body) fit for the purpose he was to carry out.

The verse now fits superbly into the context of Hebrews 10. Here the complex argument of the writer leads to the conclusion in chapter 12, paraphrased like this: 'Let us look to Jesus our example . . . who endured the cross before sitting down beside his Father . . . you also should submit unto your Father in chastening . . . and He will treat you as sons'.

We can see that "a body hast Thou prepared" (AV) does actually mean the same as "mine ears hast Thou opened" (AV). By changing the words in the quotation in Hebrews the Spirit has asked us to dig into the reasons for it and provided an answer that enlightens us on the nature of Jesus and how he became the man he was. The ramifications of this discovery are far reaching.

### **Is the treasure valuable?**

Is the treasure valuable? Absolutely! We can now make sense of such baffling chapters as John 1, "the Word was made flesh". We can also discredit any attempts to say that Jesus came with a heavenly body of some sort.

Perhaps most important of all, we are encouraged to submit to our Father in our periods of chastening, seeing His hand in our lives, and seeing the positive effect that difficult times can have upon us, in changing us from "beasts that perish" to sons of God. We see anew that Jesus was just like us, our forerunner and example, and able to help us in our hour of need.

[\(To be continued\)](#)