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What Do the Scriptures Say? (Work Station Two)

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W O R K S T A T I O N T W O



Gary B. Swanson

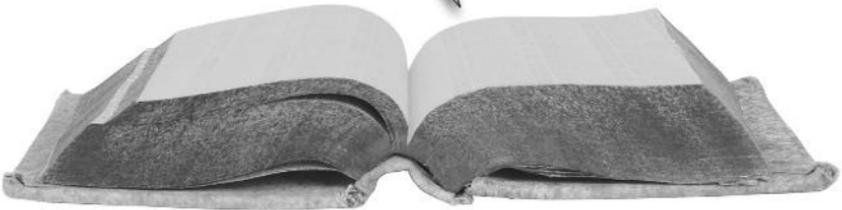
On January 25, 1990, Avianca Airlines Flight 52 ran out of fuel and crashed to the earth, causing the loss of many lives. In its report of the incident, the U.S. National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) disclosed that the whole tragic accident might have been prevented if the flight crew had used the correct specific terms to describe its critical problem to those in the control tower.

Reportedly the pilots had radioed the following message to air traffic controllers at the nearest airport: “We’re running

out of fuel.” In fact they used the wrong terms. If they had described their situation as having “minimum fuel” or “emergency fuel,” as they were supposed to under the circumstances, the air traffic controllers would have known to respond decisively and immediately. Those were the terms controllers were trained to be listening for, but because they didn’t hear them, they did not realize the gravity of the situation.

In order to anticipate every possible eventuality, the Federal Aviation Administration has designated a standard form of

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terminology for communication between aircraft and control tower. In this case, it was the personnel in the aircraft whose failure to use the official vocabulary led to miscommunication—and a great loss of human life.

In a sense, God has also established a standard for communication whose importance has life-or-death consequences. In point of fact, it has cosmic implications. He chose to reveal His will through Scripture so that those who love Him may navigate a flight plan through life in safety and security.

Given that, one might conclude that humankind would be universally intent on learning what God has to say to us, parsing everything as if our lives depended on it. As it happens, our everlasting lives, indeed, do depend on it.

Some have been moved to recognize this. Through the ages God's people—spiritual Israel—have maintained a vital reliance on Scripture as the guiding light of their lives. In responding to God's grace, they have considered it a privilege to follow its leading. "In every age there were witnesses for God—men who cherished faith in Christ as the only mediator between God and man, *who held the Bible as the only rule of life*, and who hallowed the true Sabbath."¹

But there has also been a broad mix of reactions to God's Word that do not acknowledge its full author-

ity. Some reject it outright. They say it is nothing more than ancient superstition from which humankind has been liberated by the Enlightenment. Others, recognizing that Scripture undeniably contains at least some germ of truth, seek to glean from it a measure of general spiritual guidance. Both of these depend primarily on human reason. Both subject Scripture to a scientific process that usually precludes anything that would be classified as supernatural.

As it happens, the very earliest pages of Scripture recount a cautionary tale about this very issue. The experience of Cain, Adam and Eve's eldest son, their firstborn, is a good example of what happens when you measure the Word of God by human standards or measurements—by human reason alone. From a human perspective, Cain's offering as a sacrifice the very best of his produce—his fruit basket—made perfect sense. Hadn't God originally put humankind in "the garden of Eden to cultivate it"? (Gen. 2:15, NASB). It doesn't say anything about tending sheep there. Younger brother Abel was the shepherd; Cain was not. But Cain was surely following God's command to cultivate the garden. Couldn't the elder brother's gesture have been construed as a sincere effort to do the right thing?

Intentionally or not, Cain had

missed the point of God's mandate regarding the submission of sacrificial offerings. He had misinterpreted it. At the centrality of this command was the emphasis on blood. As the old saying goes, you don't get blood from a turnip—or any other fruit or vegetable, for that matter. Cain may have thought that God was expecting him to use the brain that God had given him to apply his human reason to this requirement, to turn his best skills of hermeneutics in his preparation to bring an offering to God.

Cain was dead wrong. His attempt to substitute something else for blood in the sacrifice was a rejection of the principle that blood—God's blood—was the only way that humankind can be saved from sin.

It should be acknowledged that Cain did not get his instructions regarding appropriate offerings from his close reading of the Holy Word. There was, of course, no Scripture in his time. How could he be reading Scripture when the account of his own life is contained in its initial chapters? He didn't have a leather-bound, onion-skin, cross-referenced study Bible—in any version—to go to for the necessary information about God's expectations for a sacrifice. In his time, he didn't even have the crudest form of parchment.

But Cain did have the benefit of

the direct and specific Word of God, delivered in person to Adam, his father. *How, we wonder, could Cain have missed the point? How could he have had the temerity to question the authority of God's Word?* The answer is this: he “permitted his mind to run in the same channel that led to Satan's fall—indulging the desire for self-exaltation and questioning the divine justice and authority.”²

The decision to base interpretation of God's Word on anything other than a recognition of His authority is willful. It isn't a matter of inadvertence. It isn't “Oops!”

Any rejection of the authority of God's Word today is just as much an act of will as was that of Cain. It is an audacious decision to rely primarily on personal, human reason in evaluating the authenticity of God's attempt to reveal His will to humankind.

As has been said, “Christianity is different from all other religions. They are the story of man's search for God. The Gospel is the story of God's search for man.”³

REFERENCES

¹ *The Great Controversy*, p. 61. Italics supplied.

² *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 71.

³ Dewi Morgan, cited in Isabella D. Bunn, *444 Surprising Quotes About the Bible* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 2005), p. 33.

