THE NATURE OF THE BIBLE



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For, All flesh is as grass, And all the glory thereof as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower falls: But the word of the Lord abides for ever. And this is the word of good tidings which was preached unto you.
I Peter 1:23-24

INTRODUCTION

This study will look at the Scriptures to see what the Bible has to say about itself and to emphasize its uniqueness. We will study this topic in four primary areas: the terms of the Bible; the attitudes toward the Bible; the wonders of the Bible; and the supernatural origin of the Bible.

I. THE TERMS OF THE BIBLE

The first area is to delineate certain special terms or terminologies. Concerning the holy writings to which we adhere, there are four major terms.

A. Bible

The first term is the most common term, the word "Bible." Our English word "Bible" comes from the Greek word *biblios*, which means a "roll" or a "book." The word biblios is used in the Greek text of Luke 4:17, where it is used specifically for the scroll of Isaiah the Prophet. When we talk about the word "Bible," we are emphasizing that the Scriptures are a body of work that originally came in the form of a roll or a scroll and, in more recent times of our human history, in the form of a book.

B. Scripture

A second very important and common term is the word "Scripture." The English word "scripture" is a translation of the Greek word *graphei*, which literally means "writings." It is used of both secular writings and sacred writings. Particularly in the Bible, the word is used of books which were regarded as sacred; books that were regarded as uniquely inspired by God. For example, in Romans 3:4, the term *grapho* is used specifically of the Old Testament when Paul says: as it is

written and then goes on to quote Psalm 51:4. In II Timothy 3:16, it is used again of the Old Testament. In II Peter 3:16, the very same word, *graphei* or "scripture," which is used of the Old Testament, is also used of Paul's writings. What we should carefully note here is that Peter, who had a dispute with Paul in Galatians 2, in the course of time began to realize that the writings of Paul were Scripture. The very fact that he used the same term that the Jews used to refer to the Old Testament shows us that Peter considered the writings of Paul of equal inspiration as the Old Testament itself.

So, the word "Bible" emphasizes the concept of a "roll" or a "book" which is a written revelation that God has given to us, while the word for Scripture, *graphei*, emphasizes that these sacred rolls or sacred books are indeed inspired of God.

C. Word of God

A third term, "the Word of God," is a very common substitute for the terms "Bible" and "Scripture" in our day. In the Bible, the expression "the Word of God" is used in both the Old and New Testaments to emphasize the revelation of God in written form. The key Greek term is *logos*, which means "word."

In Matthew 15:6, the expression *the word of God* is used specifically of the Law of Moses. In John 10:35, the expression is used of the Old Testament. In Romans 3:2, *logion* is translated as *oracles*. In Hebrews 4:12, the expression *the word of God* is used of all Scripture whether we speak of the Scriptures of the Old Testament or the Scriptures of the New Testament.

D. Testament

A fourth term is "testament." This is not a very common term, not nearly as common as the terms "Bible," "Scripture," or the "Word of God." The term "testament" basically means "covenant." The word is used to distinguish between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant, the Old Testament and the New Testament. In particular, the word is used in dealing with the specific, unique covenants of Scripture.

II. THE ATTITUDES TOWARD THE BIBLE

The second area of this study concerning the Bible deals with various attitudes that people have had toward the Scriptures in history and in our modern day. We can divide these attitudes into six basic categories.

A. Rationalism

The first category is that of Rationalism. The main point of Rationalism is that the mind is supreme. There are basically two forms of Rationalism: Extreme Rationalism and Moderate

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Rationalism. Extreme Rationalism denies the possibility of God's revealing Himself, especially through a written document such as the Scriptures. Extreme Rationalism is the view of Atheism or Agnosticism. In the earlier days of American history, Extreme Rationalism included the theology of Deism, which was the theology of many of the American forefathers. Atheism, Agnosticism, and Deism are all example of Extreme Rationalism.

The second form of Rationalism is Moderate Rationalism, which allows for the possibility of some revelation from God, but goes on to say that the human mind is the final judge of the validity of revelation. Moderate Rationalism today is exemplified by Modernism or Religious Liberalism.

B. Mysticism

A second category of attitudes toward the Bible is called Mysticism. The main point of Mysticism is that experience is supreme; experience is the final authority. If it fits our experience, it is correct and valid, but if it does not fit our experience, it is invalid. They claim that normative revelation cannot be received in a normal way. Those who hold this attitude will look at the Bible and agree that it is the Word of God, but they will go on to say that, the Word of God is not complete, that there is more spiritual and divine truth available to souls that are "quickened" to receive it. They hold to added spiritual truths beyond the Scriptures. This type of false Mysticism is exemplified by the theology of Pantheism, Quakerism, and Thomas á Kempis.

Not all Mysticism is wrong, because there is a form of True Mysticism. True Mysticism is the illumination of the mind by the Holy Spirit through the Scriptures. In Jude 3, the term *the faith* refers to the whole body of truth; "the whole body of truth that has already been delivered once and for all to the Church by the apostles." We already have all the truth, which God has chosen to give us. We do not need to seek mystical experiences to try to gain additional truth beyond the Bible. True Mysticism believes in illumination by the Holy Spirit through the Scriptures, whereas False Mysticism states that experience is the final verdict for determining what is true and what is false. A true, biblical mystic believes that the Bible is the final authority, and all our experiences must be judged by Scripture; we must not permit our experience to become the judge of Scripture.

C. Romanism

The third category of attitudes toward the Scriptures is that of Romanism, which teaches that the Roman Church is supreme. This view says that the Bible is the product of the church, so the church can be its only true interpreter. In Romanism, the Scriptures are viewed as being incomplete, that there is more truth available to the church through the church. Romanism strongly emphasizes the obscurity of

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the Scriptures, saying that because the Scriptures are obscure, only the church can clarify them. Therefore, the church is the one dominant factor to determine what any passage means.

In Romanism, a tremendous amount of authority is given to church tradition. Also, Romanism tends to give priority of authority to the Latin Vulgate instead of the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures. Although it is only a translation from the original Hebrew and Greek, in Romanism the Latin Vulgate is often given priority over the original Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament.

Furthermore, connected to all this, Romanism holds to the concept of apostolic succession. They teach that Peter was the first Pope, and that there has been a continuous line of papal authority through papal and apostolic succession. Because of this apostolic succession found only in the Roman church, only the Roman church has the truth of what the Bible actually means, and they must determine the meaning for us. This is why they believe the church is supreme.

D. Neo Orthodoxy

The fourth category of attitudes toward the Scriptures is known as Neo-orthodoxy. In Neo-orthodoxy, the encounter is supreme. According to Neo-orthodox theology, the Bible is a fallible witness to the revelation of God in the Word, which was the Messiah. They go on to say that, the Bible is not the Word of God, but it does contain the Word of God. It is for the individual to determine what is the Word of God within the Bible and what is not. To clearly understand what is and what is not the Word of God, there is the need for some type of divine encounter. They all emphasize this need of a divine encounter, though none of them agree with each other exactly what this divine encounter is about and how one knows whether or not he has had one!

Furthermore, they disagree among themselves on what is the Word of God within the Bible and what is not. Since they do not believe that the Bible is the Word of God, but that it only contains the Word of God, they themselves become the final judge as to what in the Bible is considered the Word of God and what is not. Because the encounter is supreme, everyone can have his own encounter and still come up with totally different conclusions.

E. Cults

The fifth category of attitudes toward the Bible is that of the cults. Basically, the cults teach that the Bible plus some other writing is supreme. The key mark of a cult is that, while they affirm that the Bible is the Word of God, they also affirm another writing as having equal inspiration, which often becomes more important than the Bible itself. For instance, Mormonism has the Book of Mormon that they

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consider to be inspired. Christian Science has Mary Baker Eddy's book, "The Key to the Scriptures," which they consider to be equally inspired. The key mark of a cult is that they accept the Bible as the Word of God plus the writing of someone else as being of equal, if not greater, authority. So in this category, the Bible is not the only authority but, in addition, there must be the writing of the founder of the cult, which is of equal authority.

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Summary: These first five categories of attitudes toward the Scriptures can be categorized as false attitudes or false views of the Bible, because none of them are willing to accept the Bible alone as the final authority. In Rationalism, the mind is supreme as the final authority. In Mysticism, the experience is supreme as their final authority. In Romanism, the church is supreme and the final authority. In Neo-orthodoxy, the individual's encounter is the supreme authority. Among the cults, the Bible plus the writings of the founder are supreme as the final authority. None of these first five attitudes can be classed as correct attitudes since they are not willing to accept the Bible alone as the final and supreme authority.

F. Orthodoxy

Only the sixth category of attitudes is the proper biblical attitude toward the Scriptures. This is the orthodox attitude: the Bible alone is supreme and is the final authority. Orthodox believers will affirm that the Bible is the infallible Word of God. In the original writings, it is inspired and without error. The Bible is the final and only authority in all manners and matters of faith and practice. The Bible is true in everything that it affirms to be true.

Concerning the mind or reason, it must be subservient to the Word of God. If the mind is thinking in terms that are contrary to the Scriptures, it is not the mind that judges the Scriptures, but the Scriptures judge the thoughts of the mind. Concerning the experience of Mysticism, the Bible is the final judge of experience, and experience cannot determine the truth of Scripture. Concerning Romanism, it is not the church that determines the meaning of the Bible, but rather, the Bible determines the proper place of the church. Concerning the encounter, a man does not need a unique encounter before he can comprehend what is the Word of God in the Scriptures. The Bible is the Word of God. If a man is a believer and has been regenerated by the Holy Spirit, he is by his very relationship to God receiving input or enlightenment from the Holy Spirit and can understand the Scriptures. Concerning the issue of the cults, the answer of Orthodoxy is that the Bible, and the Bible alone, is supreme; the 66 books of the Scriptures are all that have been inspired by God in written form. Any other writing is the writing of a false prophet or false prophetess.

Those who hold to the supremacy of the Bible believe that knowledge

is subject to the Bible, and there is no "inner light" that adds revelation beyond the Bible. There is only the light of the Holy Spirit that illuminates the meaning of the Scriptures, but does not add any more revelation. There is no authority given to the church or to man beyond that which is given in the Scriptures themselves.

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III. THE WONDERS OF THE BIBLE

The third major area of this study will deal with the wonders of the Bible, which can be seen in four ways: in its formation, its preservation, its subject matter, and in its influence.

A. The Formation of the Bible

The formation of the Bible shows its diversity in unity. For example, the period of time between the writing of the first book and the writing of the last book was approximately 1,600 years. In spite of this, not one section contradicts another.

Furthermore, God used about forty different men to write the books of the Scriptures. As there is a total of 66 books, some of these men wrote more than one. The 66 books of the Bible were written by forty different authors over a period of 1,600 years. Here is a test case: Take any subject such as science, and scan a period of 1,600 years. Pick out forty scientists who have written scientific books, until you come up with a total of 66 books by forty different scientists, written over a period of 1,600 years. Would there be any real unity? Would the result be no contradiction whatsoever? The answer is obvious. Just by merely glancing at history, it would be impossible to find something equal to the uniqueness of the formation of the Bible. Indeed, the formation of the Bible shows a unique diversity within its unity. But because it has perfect unity, there is uniformity in the Scriptures without one part contradicting another.

But the diversity in the formation of the Bible can be seen in more ways than this. There are other factors that show the uniqueness and the wonder of the formation of the Scriptures.

1. Its Diversity of Language

One example showing the uniqueness of its formation is that the Scriptures were written in three different languages. Most of it was written in the Hebrew language. The second largest portion was written in Greek. The smallest portion was written in the Aramaic language. Thus, not only were there forty authors writing 66 books over 1,600 years, but they were writing it in three different languages: Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic, and still there is diversity-in-unity, resulting in perfect harmony.

2. Its Diversity in Location

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Diversity in location can be seen in that the books of the Scriptures were written in at least six different parts of the world. The majority of it was written in the Land of Israel. Other sections were written in Babylon, Egypt, Greece, Rome, Arabia, and perhaps others. So, the diversity can also be seen in that, although the Scriptures were written in at least six different countries, there is still perfect harmony.

3. Its Diversity of Authors

Another way of showing this diversity is the fact that the writers were not all professional scribes as an occupation. In fact, there are at least eleven different occupations among these forty authors: kings, priests, prophets, soldiers, statesmen, shepherds, fishermen, a tax collector, a doctor, a tent-maker, and a farmer. These forty authors had at least eleven different occupations, accounting for a wide range of writing skill and style. But in spite of all this diversity, there is still perfect harmony.

4. Its Diversity in Literary Forms

The uniqueness of the diversity can be seen in one other way in that there are at least eight different literary forms: historical narratives, biographies, poetry, proverbs, drama, sermons, letters or epistles, and psalms. In spite of the diversity of these various literary forms, there is still perfect harmony.

Summary: The first wonder of the Bible is in its formation in that there is tremendous diversity. It was written over a period of 1,600 years by forty different authors, writing 66 books in three different languages, in six different countries, coming out of eleven different occupations, and writing in eight literary forms, and yet producing an absolute harmony. This would be impossible with any other subject or book.

B. The Preservation of the Bible

The second wonder of the Bible is seen in its preservation in two ways: its unaltered state and its indestructibility.

1. Its Unaltered State

First, the text itself has remained intact. Sometimes, people will ask, "How do we know we have the original Scriptures? How do we know we have the Bible as it was originally written?"

God has preserved numerous Greek texts, and by virtue of these many Greek texts, it is possible to clearly determine what the original Greek New Testament was.

As for the Old Testament, there are not nearly as many manuscripts extant as we have of the Greek New Testament. However, we know that the text itself has remained intact because of one very important fact. Before 1947, the oldest Hebrew manuscript known was the

Masoretic text, which dated from A.D. 1000. Because it was so late after the fact, numerous critics of the Scriptures poked fun at it and questioned how it is possible to believe that the Old Testament has remained pure.

Then in 1947, the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered. Later, as archaeologists continued to dig at the site where the scrolls were discovered, at least one scrap of every Old Testament book of the Bible was found, except for the Book of Esther. If one compares the Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls, which date between 100 B.C. and A.D. 100, with the Hebrew of the Masoretic texts, there is virtually no variation, even though the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Masoretic text are a good 1,000 years apart from each other. Where there is a variation, there is absolutely no change of meaning. For example, one scroll may say, "He went to Jerusalem." Another scroll may say, "He went unto Jerusalem." Although there is a slight variation between the two texts, the meaning has not changed: the person had gone to Jerusalem. So the text has remained intact.

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2. Its Indestructibility

The second evidence of the Bible's preservation is its indestructibility. I Peter 1:23-25 states: *having been begotten again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, through the word of God, which lives and abides. For, All flesh is as grass, And all the glory thereof as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower falls: But the word of the Lord abides for ever. And this is the word of good tidings which was preached unto you.*

God has promised that He would preserve His Word. Indeed, there is ample evidence of this throughout history in that men have tried to destroy the Scriptures, but the Scriptures have been preserved.

For example, the Roman Emperor Diocletian said, "The Christian religion is destroyed and the worship of the gods restored." Only ten years later, Emperor Constantine made Christianity the state religion. The French philosopher Voltaire stated, "Fifty years from now the world will hear no more about the Bible." Exactly fifty years later, the Geneva Bible Society bought the very press that Voltaire used to print his statements, and they used it to print more Bibles.

Tyndale was one of the early translators of the Bible into English. He underwent such tremendous persecution that his translation was virtually destroyed. Opponents bragged that the Bible would never again appear in English. Yet today, the majority of Bibles printed around the world happen to be English Bibles.

Thomas Payne was an American philosopher who was one of the country's founding fathers. He was a critic of the Scriptures who began to write a series of diatribes against the Bible, saying, "When I get through, there will not be five Bibles in America." While Thomas Payne did some good writing in defending the American Revolution

and American independence, he was certainly dead wrong about the Scriptures. In fact, in my own library alone, I have more than five Bibles. Indeed, in this nation there are millions of Bibles-considerably more than the five he predicted would be left.

These are clear evidences that the Bible remains indestructible by virtue of God's preserving power. The wonders of the Bible can be shown by its formation and by preservation.

C. The Subject Matter of the Bible

A third wonder of the Bible is its subject matter. The subjects of the Scriptures are unique among all books, including other holy books. For example, the subjects of the Bible include the personality, unity, and Trinity of God. The Bible speaks about mankind's origin and fall. It introduces the unique concept of the God-Man in the person of Yeshua (Jesus) the Messiah. It deals with God's provision of salvation. The prophetic portions speak of the culmination of all history. The subject matter is as diverse as the formation of the Bible itself.

In spite of the diversity of the subject matter, there is still a unifying principle that all these things which do not seem to be connected are ultimately working toward the culmination of history for the glory of God. God will be glorified through all these various programs that He has introduced to us in the Scriptures; such as, man's salvation, Israel's history, the Messianic Kingdom, and in many other ways. Combining such great variety and diversity of subject matter to bring out the unifying principle of the glory of God shows the uniqueness and wonder of the Bible.

D. The Influence of the Bible

The fourth wonder of the Bible can be seen through its influence. The Bible has had tremendous influence on individuals, whether they are true believers or even unbelievers. The Bible has changed the lives of many individuals. It has inspired the writing of various classics and novels. It has inspired the paintings of some of the greatest artists in history. Indeed, it has had tremendous influence on individual men in the arts, sciences, and the humanities.

It has also had an influence on nations. The concepts of cleanliness, legality, honor, and religiosity have all come from the influence that the Scriptures have had upon those nations that have embraced them. In fact, most of the law codes in the western world, both in Europe and the New World, were influenced by the law codes of the Scriptures.

But much more importantly, the Bible has had an influence upon individuals, bringing them to a personal relationship with God. Through the Scriptures, they clearly saw that they were sinners and also knew they could do nothing about their sin on their own. The

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price of sin had to be paid, and Yeshua paid that price. The Bible has resulted in the regeneration and salvation of countless individuals.

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IV. THE SUPERNATURAL ORIGIN OF THE BIBLE

The final area of discussion concerning the nature of the Bible has to do with its supernatural origin and can be clearly seen in ten different ways.

A. The Book of God

First, the supernatural origin of the Bible that can be clearly seen in that it is the book of God. The Bible is theocentric: God is the center of the Scriptures. Furthermore, while other holy books may talk about God, the Bible is still unique among books in the way it talks about God. The Bible presents God as different from the gods of other contemporary writers. Furthermore, the Bible presents God as monotheistic rather than the polytheistic gods which were flagrant in the days when the Scriptures were written. Although later holy books such as the Koran and others also talk about monotheism, even here the Bible is unique in that only the Bible talks about the Trinity of this monotheism. Indeed, the Bible is the book of God that presents Him as different from the ones depicted in all other holy books, whether contemporary or written later.

B. In the Problem of Sin

The second way the supernatural origin of the Bible can be clearly seen is that the Bible alone presents the problem of sin and a cure for it that works. Only the Bible spells out sin for what it really is. Only the Bible presents a cure that truly and honestly works, as testified to by many who have experienced the supernatural working of the Scriptures in their lives.

C. In Its Ethics and Morals

The third way the supernatural origin of the Bible can be clearly seen is that the Bible is unique in its ethics and morals. For example, the ethics and morals of the Bible are comprehensive in that they cover all areas of human conduct. They cover the areas of husband wife relationships and parent child relationships; proper conduct for employers and their employees, governments and their citizens, and states and the nation. It covers many spheres; such as, sexual, business, economic, and recreational. In all of these areas, the ethics and morals of the Scriptures are very comprehensive.

Furthermore, the ethics and morals of the Bible are unique in that the motives themselves are judged. The Bible does not merely deal with outward conformity to the standards of ethics and morals as other books do; it deals with the actual motivation involved.

Finally, the Bible provides the only basis for true ethical behavior;

behavior based upon the recognition that God exists, and that He will judge every man according to his works.

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D. In Its Continuity

The fourth way the supernatural origin is seen is in the continuity of the Bible. In the Bible, there is perfect harmony even though there are 66 books, by 40 different authors, written over 1,600 years, in three different languages, from six different countries, from eleven different occupations, using eight literary forms. All other holy books were written by one author in a short span of time. The Koran, for example, was written by only one author: Mohammed. Thus, the continuity of the Bible is evidence of its supernatural origin.

E. In Its Prophecies

The fifth way that the supernatural origin of the Scriptures is seen is in its prophecies and their fulfillment. Other holy books contain prophecies, which are open to various interpretations, so that no matter how things turn out, they can still try to claim fulfillment. That is simply not the case with the Bible. The Bible contains very clear prophecies; they tend to be very pointed and limited. Therefore, when the fulfillment comes, it is very exact. No other holy book can point to a lengthy series of prophecies followed by their perfect fulfillment. Yet in the Bible, that is exactly what we have. All other holy books, written by one author in a short period of time, cannot, of course, show prophecy and fulfillment. However, because of the uniqueness of the Bible's having been written over 1,600 years by forty different authors, one writer makes a prophecy, and many years later, another writer records the fulfillment of that prophecy.

F. In Its Types and Antitypes

The sixth way that the Bible is supernatural in its origin is in its types and antitypes. These types and antitypes show a unity of the Old and New Testaments. Although approximately four hundred and fifty years transpired between the closing of the Old Testament and the first book of the New Testament, and we move from the Hebrew language of the Old Testament to the Greek language of the New Testament, still the typologies of the Old Testament have a clear and obvious fulfillment in the antitypes of the New Testament. There is clear unity of the Old and New Testaments in spite of the diversity of language and centuries of separation between them.

G. In Its Literary Value

The seventh way that shows the supernatural origin the Bible is that it is also unique as literature. Even unbelievers have seen the literary value of the Bible as paramount. Even today, the Bible is still studied in terms of literature in many of our universities. In contemporary literature, there is simply no comparison to the uniqueness of the Bible.

H. In the Absence of Prejudice

The eighth way that shows its supernatural origin is that the Bible is

unprejudiced. Most of the other holy books never report the shortcomings of their heroes. Their heroes were always just that: heroes. But the Bible does not do that; it points out the shortcomings and failures of its heroes as well as their best qualities. For example, King David was called by the Scriptures "a man after God's own heart." David was viewed by the Scriptures as a hero, a great warrior, and one who gained victory by use of his military might and abilities. At the same time, the same Bible points out David's failures. His failure in dealing properly with his son Absalom in a father son relationship is clearly reported. The Bible also reported David's adultery and his committing murder. The Bible is, indeed, unprejudiced, pointing to the shortcomings and failures of its heroes.

I. In Its Scientific Accuracy

The ninth way of seeing the supernatural origin of the Bible concerns the Bible and science. The Bible is not a book on science, but when the Bible touches on a scientific point, it has been absolutely accurate. Only scientific theories have gone against Scripture, but they are, to this day, only theories. Those things that have been proven as scientific facts have never been able to disprove the Scriptures. Again, the Bible is not a book on science, but when it touches on science, it has been absolutely accurate and without error.

J. In Its Enduring Freshness

The tenth and final way in which the supernatural origin of the Bible is seen is in its enduring freshness. It is read and reread like no other book. I have lost count of how often I have read through the Bible since I became a believer at the age of thirteen. I have read the Bible many times, over and over again, and I have never found myself bored. I cannot stand to read most books even a second time, because I already know the plot and know what will happen. So I simply do not read a book a second time. But there is a difference with the Bible. I have reread it and reread it, and because it contains an enduring freshness, it continually retains my interest.

As Lewis Sperry Chafer wrote, "The Bible is not a book a man could write if he would, nor is the Bible a book man would write if he could."✡

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MBS021, 034, 037and 041.