



The Biblical Heritage Center's
DISCOVERING THE BIBLE

*Our beliefs must be large enough to include all of the FACTS;
open enough to be tested; and flexible enough to change when more
accurate information is found.*

2008 • NUMBER 1

Who's at the door?

By Ike Tennison

*Comments and
Questions for your
Consideration*

(1) Have you ever "studied" this little book? Did you pause over any of its words, trying to understand what they mean?

(2) Have you ever wondered who was at your front door, even after you see the person(s)?

(3) Do you ever compare other translations of the Bible with the one you use to see if there are any differences?

(4) Do you feel my interpretation at this point is valid?

(5) Have you ever studied what was going on in the first and second centuries among early Christians?

9 Any one who goes ahead and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God; he who abides in the doctrine has both the Father and the Son. 10 If any one comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into the house or give him any greeting; 11 for he who greets him shares his wicked work. (2 John 9-11)

The first time I really studied (not just read!) this passage, I came away somewhat puzzled.

The reason I was puzzled had to do with the words "...does not bring this doctrine..." How would the person who goes to answer the door know whether or not the person at the door was bringing this doctrine with him or her? Many times my doorbell has rung and, when I went to the door, I had no idea who the person standing there was unless he had some identifying mark on him—like the name of his company on a uniform or a badge of some kind, etc. But the writer of the words in the Scripture lesson seems to be very definite about someone being able to tell whether or not the visitor was bringing the doctrine. So what does the writer mean by these words?

You can compare many other translations of the New Testament and will find that the verb translated "bring" above is about the same in them all except obvious paraphrased works like the *New Living Translation*, which gives this meaning to the words in verse 10: "*does not teach the truth about Christ.*" These words do not at all correspond to the Greek text of the words and, in fact, raise as many questions as the original words. How did someone know if a person who showed up at the door "does not teach the truth about the Christ"?

The clear implication of verse 10 is that there was something about the person at the door that gave him away as a follower of the Christ or not. Because of the comment in the last half of verse 10 indicates that the time involved in the encounter is no more than the time it takes to say "Hello," there must be some visible evidence that demonstrates the stranger's relationship to the Christ. I believe there is some evidence that such a stranger may have literally carried something that was written that showed that he was a follower of the Christ—like the modern day driver carries a driver's license to prove to a patrolman that he/she has indeed passed that state's minimum standards to be the operator of a vehicle.

At the time when the second epistle of John was written, there was already a great concern among believers about "false apostles" and "false prophets" (see verses 7-8). This was particularly true because of the number of itinerant preachers and teachers who made the rounds from one city to another. Apparently, only those who believed in and taught the teaching that Jesus is the Christ would be willing to carry around a document that clearly established their credentials. False apostles and prophets would not do so, since the

teaching written on the piece of papyrus would be contrary to the message that they were proclaiming. The evidence to support this interpretation of verse 10 comes from a Greek papyrus manuscript dated to the sixth century of the Christian era.

The following commentary and translation come from the book *Selections From The Greek Papyri*, edited by George Milligan (Cambridge: University Press 1901) pages 132-134:

(6) Do you make use of commentaries on the verses you are studying?

"The following interesting text was discovered by Wilcken in the course of the excavations at Heracleopolis Magna in 1899. It evidently formed one of those amulets which, as we know, the early Christians were in the habit of carrying in counterpart to the old heathen practice ... and the fact that the papyrus-roll had been closely pressed together for ease in wearing round the neck made its decipherment a work of the greatest difficulty. Thanks however to the discoverer's skill and patience the text can now be reproduced in an intelligible form."

(7) Do commentators you have read ever refer to non-Biblical sources of information that may help explain a passage you are studying?

"Apart from its general character, the principal significance of the text for us, lies in the use made of the Lord's Prayer, which here takes the place of the meaningless words in the old magical charms . . . 'O Lord God all ruling, The Father, of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and thou, O holy Serenus, I Silvanus, the son of Sarapion, pray and bow my head before Thee, begging and beseeching that thou mayest drive from me thy servant the demon of witchcraft... and of pain. Take away from me all manner of disease and all manner of sickness that I may be in health. . . to say the prayer of the Gospel (thus): 'Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by thy name, Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, as in heaven so on earth. Give us to-day our daily bread, and forgive our debts, even as we also forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, O Lord of light, true God, graciously give Thy servant light. O holy Serenus, supplicate on my behalf, that I may be in perfect health.'"

It is not being suggested that the context of the "teaching" referred to in verse 10 of 2 John would be anything like this piece. Rather, the point is that at least in the sixth century it was customary for Christians to carry around such an "amulet." Two or three comments may be in order here because of some of the things said in the quotations above.

(8) Are you in agreement with my conclusion? If you are, please let me know. If you are not, please provide me with your comments.

First, "the old heathen practice" and "the old magical charms" refer to the practice of the ancients in writing down their requests and questions and leaving these written pieces in the temples of various gods. Not unlike this practice is the papyrus piece on which a Christian prayer had been written (fifth/sixth century), intended to be deposited in some church, just like similar pagan documents were left in the temples. The prayer said, incidentally, "O God, the all ruling, the holy, the true One, merciful and creative, the Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, reveal to me Thy truth, whether Thou wishest me to go to Chiout, or whether I shall find Thee aiding me and gracious. So let it be, Amen." This translation is from the above referenced book, page 131. Second, in the quotation from the "amulet" papyrus, reference is made to "Serenus." This was simply the local patron saint.

At any rate, if the interpretation of verse 10 of 2 John presented in this paper is close to the meaning, we can surmise that believers in the first century of the Christian era made it a practice to "carry the teaching" as proof of their belief in Jesus as the Christ or their adherence to or faithfulness in the teachings of Jesus, thus not admitting anyone who was not like-minded.

Thank you!
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